

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

traditional land of the Three Fires Confederacy: the Odawa, Potawatami and Ojibwe.

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Worship This Week Dec. 24, 2023

Advent 4 – Love

Piano – Dorothy O'Neill.

Sound/powerpoint/livestream –

WELCOME –

PRAYER

CAROL – 146 Angels from the realms of glory

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING – Love (Psalm 89:1-4)

Minister – I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

All – I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

Minister – You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David:

All – 'I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.'"

SONGS – Ring the bells, 143 Infant holy infant lowly

YOUNG & YOUNG AT HEART – Rita

Kid's PRAYER –

SONG – 149 Away in a manger

RECEIVE OFFERING –

ANNOUNCEMENTS – Carols and prayer 7 p.m., this evening

GOOD NEWS MOMENTS –

PRAYER REQUESTS/PRAYER –

SCRIPTURE – Hebrews 1:1-12

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. 3 He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. 5 For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? 6 And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." 7 Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels like the winds, and

his servants like flames of fire.” 8 But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” 10 And, “In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; 11 they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like clothing; 12 like a cloak you will roll them up, and like clothing they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end.”

MESSAGE – Love

One of the greatest misconceptions in this world is that the life of a true Christian believer has to be restrictive, boring and tightly bound by rules and regulations. It seems that believers are known more for what we don't do than what we can do. That's what the enemy wants the world to think. Many people take the bait and fall for it.

The other narrative is that the life that is submitted to the Spirit of Christ is free. Free from the effects of sin and knowing that a place in the Heavenly Kingdom is being prepared for you, with reservations made and a table being set with your name at a place setting and a room awaits with your name on the door – that's actually just the start. The true believer lives a life that is filled with all those things we've talked about during the first four Sundays of Advent. Hope – the fact that this world is not all there is to life. Peace – knowing that the Power of the Holy Spirit can work within us and work through us. Joy – that no matter what pain this world throws at us, we know that Christ – who knows first hand what pain is about – is with us to the end of the age.

More than that – we are invited, as I have reminded you for the past four Sundays, to dream. We are invited to allow our imaginations to be free from the restrictions of life. We can dwell on the fact that nothing is impossible for God and that all things are possible. If we walk with Christ and seek total submission to His will, we can live with Holy wonder. Every hour of each day can be a Holy adventure. Hope gives us a reason to dream, peace gives us the power to dream and joy provides the destination. What about love?

The late Ron Sharpe was fond of encouraging people in his Windsor congregation to pray big. “No wimpy prayers,” he would often say. We have a very big God. Astronomers estimate that the known universe has up to 2 trillion galaxies which contain 200 billion trillion stars. It’s a number that’s beyond comprehension. It’s so crazy, it’s cartoon-like. That’s how big God is. If God is that huge and created all of that and if he knows us intimately and loves us dearly, why pray for anything small? That powerful truth was amazingly real to Ron even during the end stages of his battle with cancer. Laying in his hospice bed, he would still chastise visitors if they prayed for little things. No wimpy prayers. Our God is an awesome God.

That may be one of the reasons the church is in the state it’s in today in North America and Europe. We’ve lost the ability to dream. We’ve become cynical and jaded. We’ve forgotten what it’s like to have childlike trust in our Creator. Holy imagination has given way to bureaucratic stagnation.

CS Lewis once wrote: “Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. . .” *The Weight of Glory*

We stay busy, thinking that productivity will make better lives. That may be true if the alternative is laziness. But we take it too far and fill our lives with so much busyness and then as a reward, in our downtime we fill it with entertainment. We spend too little time in our dreams and imagination. The true believer actually has an open door to this opportunity. It’s called prayer.

Over the past four weeks, I’ve encouraged you to dream. It’s OK to dream, it’s good to dream. It’s healthy to dream. If we have Christ we can dream. Hope gives us a reason to dream, peace gives us the power to dream, joy provides the destination. Love is the final ingredient.

Hope, peace, joy and love are the four themes the modern church has chosen to celebrate Advent. They neatly summarize the essentials of Christ, the Living God. Of course, there is much more. If Christ is God in the flesh – the same God who

created 2 trillion galaxies which contain 200 billion trillion stars – then we could spend 1,000 Sundays and still not even scratch the surface.

The opening words from the letter to the Hebrews described Jesus as the “reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being.” Truly, God in human form. The God of too many galaxies and stars to imagine chose to be born of a poor couple from a forgotten village who couldn’t even find a bed for the night.

Imagine that. It was so “out there” and beyond the imaginations of the rich and powerful people of the age – and even beyond the imaginations of supposedly faithful people – that it was outside our human radar. Yes, the star of David shined bright and an amazing chorus of angels sang. Shepherds quaked and then Magi appeared. But it would too soon be forgotten. The holy family returned to anonymous lives and it would be another 30 years before the imaginations of the people were stoked once again when Jesus began His ministry.

Christ’s teachings invited the listeners to use their imaginations. Picture what happens when seeds are planted into four different types of soil. Old cloth on new garment. The mustard seed. The weeds and the wheat. The unforgiving servant. Labourers in the vineyard. The prodigal Son. The Good Samaritan. The tenant farmers. The marriage feast. The 10 bridesmaids. And so on.

Of course, life is not just for dreaming. The Son of God was a tradesman. He recruited fishermen. His lessons included people who worked and invested. Those who work deserve their pay. Scripture has harsh words for the lazy.

It’s the well-rounded person that the Lord seeks to disciple. Work, play and imagination go together. It’s the imagination that’s lacking in today’s believers. The willingness to dream and allow one’s imagination to go wild is a gift from a powerful and loving God.

This is where love comes into play. All the power and glory, all of the vastness of the universe, all the wonder and imagination is for nothing without love. Jesus was an amazing prophet and teacher but without love he'd be a footnote in history. Love is that holy ingredient which resulted in the conception and birth of the Messiah. Love brings it home.

“God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16.

We are invited to wonder, to dream and to imagine that the Saviour of the world, the course of hope, peace, joy and love was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a lowly servant girl with her carpenter husband as the midwife and barnyard animals as delivery room personnel. Imagine that.

Imagine also that as bad as this world is, God the Father did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through Him. The deeper our faith, the greater our ability to dream, to wonder and to imagine.

HYMN – 165 O little town of Bethlehem

BENEDICTION –