

**Make Room for Others: Love, Advent 2**  
**Text: Isaiah 61:1-4; Luke 4:14-21**  
**12.9.18**



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

Here are the reflections from the Advent response cards that will be distributed during this week's worship gathering.

MY ADVENT | **Love**

*"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."* Luke 4:18

GO DEEPER

To love is to be "for" another and to intentionally make space for them. Who is in your circle? Those inside your circle are the people you find easiest to love. The 'others' in your life are usually a person or group you hold at arm's length, perhaps keeping them outside your circle because they are difficult to love or accept. Where are our circles too small? Are we looking outside the circle?

MY RESPONSE

Inside the circle, write the names or initials of people who are close to you. Now write the names or initials of those on the outside of your circle. Ask God to help you make room for others, to widen your circle and the love you have to offer.

TAKE A STEP

This week, think about the 'others', the name(s) you put outside your circle. Pray daily that God will show you ways you can widen your circle and love that person the way Jesus taught us to love. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. Are there specific parts of this definition of love that are hard for you when it comes to loving those outside your circle? This week take action to love your 'others' through an act of service, a note, an invitation, forgiveness.

*"What evidence is there in my life that I am spacious and welcoming? Are there unhealthy assumptions and prejudices I might need to address and abandon in order to better make room for others for /with Jesus?"*

*“Who am I loving that will likely never love me back? Whose needs am I considering who will likely never give thought for my own? Who am I serving who will likely never say “thanks”?”*

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## Teaching Notes...

I was reminded, once again this week, that all that I consider **“painful”** is really experiencing the void of something for which my heart longs... for which I was created. **“Heartsick”**, as Proverbs describes it (13:12).

The deeper our pain and frustration and longing, the larger our vision of restoration must be in order to accommodate hope. The story is so unbelievable, yet it just seems to incite belief. The scenes are so fantastic: talking angels, virgins giving birth to the baby-God. It’s the only way to communicate a Messianic story.

### **Isaiah actually reminds us that..**

#### **...it’s hard to hope “logically”.**

If it’s within my capacity to generate or implement, it doesn’t really require hope. It’s not really hope if it doesn’t “defy” logic.

#### **...it’s difficult to hope alone.**

In isolation, the sound of my own voice seems to drown out the God-inspired messages coming toward me. I need someone whose vision isn’t blurred or obstructed by the reality itself.

Isaiah is the Advent prophet. He is the most quoted of the prophets (particularly by Jesus). He is famous for challenging our tendencies to keep God in the “margins” of our lives. He insists that God be primary. Central. Weighty. Significant. He is to be the ‘one thing’ (devotion) that makes sense of everything else. Isaiah describes it as “glory”.

We are often exhorted to *‘make room for God’* in our lives. Isaiah insists that God is far too big to fit into our lives. We must fit into his.

Isaiah is renowned for his ability to paint, with ‘word-brushes’, an **image** which inspires an **imagination**. The reality that he is describing is so divergent from our own, yet the scene has enough familiarity that allows us to consider, *“What if...?”*

... a future, so hopeful and so healing, that it would actually cause you not to forget your past, but to ‘remember it no more’?

... a place where there was no more crying and weeping? It would mean that everything that caused sorrow had been removed.

... no more SIDS and even at (100), you're still not eligible for the "Senior's Discount"?

... a reality in which God is so profoundly present that he would actually answer you before you called out to him?

... wolves and lambs sharing a meal without fear of becoming a meal?

... no one could hurt you on *'holy mountain'*?

[Isaiah 65]

Isaiah writes during a particularly turbulent season in Israel's history (circa 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) It was a time of ethnic superiority and political division. A time of national and international hostility. A time of unimaginable prosperity and crippling poverty. A time of declining spiritual health (a flurry of religious activity and observances amidst social and ethical deterioration.

Darkness is not simply an 'atmospheric' condition, but a spiritual climate which is pervasive.

Isaiah's vision reminds us that there's nothing fanciful about hope. It's rugged. It's determined. Isaiah says that it's for the "afflicted", the "brokenhearted", the "captives", "those who mourn", the "faint of spirit".

He utilizes a God-word; an Advent word: "**instead**". Inextricably linked to hope is the possibility of exchanging one condition for another. One reality for another.

Some (500) years after Isaiah made this declaration, Jesus stood in the synagogue and said that all their hopes were coming true in him. This was Jesus' *'drop-the-mic'* moment! (Luke 4)

Ask the Samaritan woman who exchanged discrimination and a string of failed relationships for something to satisfy her thirst for love... for life (John 4).

Ask Jairus about the exchange of mourning the loss of the daughter her loved for the joy of life-restored (Matthew 9).

Ask the reckless and defiant son about the extravagant love of Father which allowed him to exchange the garments soaked with pig urine for a party-robe and a disco-ball! (Luke 15).

### **You were created out of love, to be-loved, and for love.**

At the center of everything is the self-initiated, self-giving, goodness of God which establishes the framework for all our relationships and interactions.

Here's where this gets challenging: we typically form our own definition of love based on our experiences, then we project that onto God and utilize it as a means of assessing all of our other interactions. You can imagine the dilemma that this creates for God.

God now becomes the dad who pledged his love for you, but who abandoned you. God becomes your boyfriend who abused you. God becomes the demanding mother whom you could never please.

Instead, John says, “*God is love*” (1 John 4), and that he alone provides the definition and expression of love by which all other love-claims are judged.

“*Watch and learn*”, Paul says. “*Keep company with God and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us and love like that*” (Ephesians 5).

When pressed to condense all that God was up to and all that he desired for us, Jesus pulled together (2), timeless OT texts:

“*Love the LORD, your God, with all of your heart...*” Deuteronomy 6:5

“*Love your neighbor as you love yourself...*” Leviticus 19:18

### **God-love (agape) and neighbor-love are synonymous.**

The entire Christian life can be seen through the grid of Incarnation and Hospitality.

'**Incarnation**'| the act of God lovingly-entering into the world.

'**Hospitality**'| the act of compassionately inviting other people into our world.

### **It is “love of the stranger”. Hospitality.**

“*Strangers*”--- people without a place; people who are “dis-located”; detached from life-sustaining relationships. They are not simply people with whom we have yet to be acquainted, but are often the hurting that we “do” know.

When we practice hospitality, we offer people, first, a place with us so that they might find their place with God [*“I was a stranger and you invited me in...”* Matthew 25]

### **If love is about the way that we are “for” another, compassion seems to be the way that we are “with” another.**

“*compassion*”- to feel with or to feel the feelings of another.

### **Compassion...**

... refuses to ‘profile’ people and pre-determine our response (prejudice). We’ve already pre-determined the kinds of people we will ‘let in’. We’ve already mentally ‘vetted’ them (screened them) and located them as either “in” or “out”.

... is what makes love less abstract and more identifiable.

... necessitates specific acts of love which help to bear or eliminate another’s suffering (Galatians 6:1), whether circumstantial or self-inflicted.

... what invites us to consider our own suffering (e.g. sitting with someone who is mourning puts us in touch with our own sense of loss; walking alongside someone who feels lonely reminds me of all the ways that I am prone to isolation and alone-ness.)

**I am discovering that my primary call is to “love” and love always re-aligns the boundaries. It is always extending them to create a greater sense of welcome and make room for those God desires to love through me.**