

**“CHRISTMAS IS LOVE”  
John 15:9-17**

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday In Advent  
December 23, 2012  
Pastor Nathan J. Thompson**

Perhaps you have seen the commercial where the guy gives his wife a new Lexus SUV with a red ribbon on top. If you haven't gotten yours yet wives it may be coming. Or perhaps you have seen the diamond commercial where she is presented with a diamond necklace in her sleep. It says, “With every step, with every stone, love grows.”

And yet is this kind of giving an example of true and grounded love? We may say “no,” but there often is that expectation that certain kinds of gifts mean love. In fact, some people are offended, or even hurt, if certain kinds of presents are not given to them.

But is that what Christmas, and gift giving, is all about? I recall the story I heard one time of the man who just couldn't understand why his wife and family were leaving him. He said that he had given them everything and more than they needed.

He gave them a beautiful house, wonderful cars, all kinds of gadgets and technology, stylish clothes, terrific vacations in exotic places, membership at respectable clubs, education at private schools, etc. This husband and father felt that by him being successful, and working hard to make an excellent living, this showed how much he loved his wife and kids.

And yet the reality was that he had missed giving the most important gift—the gift of himself. He was never there for his wife as a partner, friend, or caring support. He never took the time to truly listen, to understand, to be emotionally present, to let her know she means more than his job or all this other stuff.

And with his kids he also was mostly emotionally distant. He never seemed to have priority time to spend with them. He attended some events, and even coached some of their teams, and yet he didn't know the hurts or needs in their hearts. He didn't really talk or listen to them, and he never told them face to face that he loved them, or that he was proud of them.

So all these gifts, no matter how practical or expensive, did not communicate any love to his wife and children. Even the cards he sent with them that said, “Love,” meant very little. For the true measure of love is not the word or the gift, but the actions and care from the heart.

As many of you know, I'm a music and musical lover. This topic of love often reminds me of “My Fair Lady” where Eliza sings, “Words, words, words, I'm so tired of words, if you're in love, show me. Don't talk of love, don't tell me how much, if you're in love, show me.”

The good news, my friends, is that when our God wanted to tell us how much he loves us he didn't just send us a Hallmark Card or a letter. He didn't give us a Lexus or a diamond necklace. No, when God wanted to tell us how much he loves us he sent us his very own son.

And Jesus himself didn't just tell us how much he loves us. He didn't just preach a nice sermon. No, Jesus put his words into action by going to and actually caring for the poor and needy. He touched the unclean, went to the homes of sinners and confronted head-on the religious elite.

Jesus put his love to the ultimate test by suffering and dying on a cross for you and for me. He took all of our sins and pain on himself, gave up his whole life so that we might be forgiven, might have life now, and might live forever in eternity.

Jesus said in John 15:13, *“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”* Jesus gives you the gift of himself to show you how much he loves you. He loves and cares about you more than you can ever imagine.

So Christmas is love, and that love is centered in the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ. It is a personal gift for you, no matter who you are or what you have done, or how far you have strayed from him. Jesus gives you the gift of himself and says, “I love you.”

And as Jesus comes to you each day he calls you to listen to his word filled with promises for you. He calls you to see and experience how his love is working in the hearts and lives of many in our church who are being changed and renewed in Jesus’ love, and are seeking to put their faith into action.

And Jesus calls you, my friends, to receive this most important Christmas gift by committing your heart and life to Jesus by faith. He calls you to confess your sins, to leave your burden and pains at his feet.

And he calls you to allow his love and Holy Spirit to fill you with forgiveness, with new purpose to serve him, and with love that radiates out from you to others. Jesus calls you to love others as he has loved you.

Now the word love, of course, is a very confusing word in our world today. The reason for this is because it has become for many simply a feeling, a physical attraction, a dreamy kind of experience. For many it has become mostly a selfish thing where they are longing for others to love them or to make them feel a certain way, or to satisfy their dreams.

And yet as I’ve shared before love is not a noun, but a verb. It is an action word. It is centered in a commitment to others that is more than just words, but is followed up with actual deeds and changes in one’s own heart and being.

I challenge you today—if you want to feel true love in your heart, and want to know true joy in love, go and do something loving for someone else. If you are feeling lonely and sorry for yourself, go and care for and serve someone else who may be lonely.

If you are feeling sad that you can’t afford more expensive gifts, or are feeling sad you aren’t getting your dream gifts, go and volunteer at a soup kitchen, bring gifts to a shelter, visit people in a nursing home, volunteer at a prison, go wash the feet of homeless people, get involved in our Mission Outreach efforts here at Messiah.

Feelings usually follow actions. So if you want to feel love, do something loving for another—no strings attached. If you want to experience renewal in your marriage or family, be the first to forgive, the first to change your attitude, the first to stop arguing, the first to see the good in each other. You actually take these steps and actions, and you will most always feel more love in you.

Christmas is love, my friends, because love in action is what this story is all about. Jesus left his place in heaven and actually came to this world in need. He didn't wait for us to love him first, but came to us no matter where we are at—no matter how far or close we are.

He came and put his love in action by caring for the poor, loving the sinners, touching the hurting and unclean, and by dying on the cross and rising again. Love in the person of Jesus is a verb where he offers you his grace, his forgiveness, his blessings—no strings attached.

He never waits for you to love him or to love him back. His nature is to just keep on loving you over, and over, and over again. He just keeps on loving you hoping that you will eventually receive his love, will find healing in his love, and will respond to his love through faith in him.

As I have shared before, a few years ago 14 of us from my former church experienced the love of God in a powerful way by visiting the people of our congregation's companion parish in Tanzania, Africa. These people, in one of the poorest countries in our world, are some of the most loving and joyful people I have ever met.

They prayed for us and for our church everyday. They waited for hours on the road, singing and dancing, when we came to their villages and churches. Their eyes and touch shone with Jesus' love and grace. And when one church, with nothing, offered our group the gift of two live chickens, a basket of eggs, and a bunch of just picked bananas, I broke down in tears.

They, who have so little, offered us who have so much their love and joy that can only come through Jesus. They gave all they had out of gratitude for the privilege of knowing and serving God. They showed genuine love, and through putting their love in action they were filled with even more love. Love is definitely a verb.

My friends, this Christmas it is good to give gifts to each other, even if you cannot give a new Lexus or diamond necklace. And yet I want to challenge you to also give yourself in love. Take some priority time to be with your spouse, do something nice for them, take their hand, look in their eyes and say, "I love you."

Take some time to be with your kids, or grandchildren. Isolate them for some one on one time. Let them know you are truly proud of them. Promise to do some personal things with them in the new year. Take them by the hand, look them in the eyes and say, "I love you."

Take some time to be with a sibling, with a parent, with a relative, with a good friend. Tell them how much you appreciate them. Spend some quality time together. Make some new commitments to spend more time together in the new year. Take them by the hand, look them in the eye and say, "I love you."

My friends, Christmas is love because Jesus is the true gift of love. He changes the whole reason for living and for giving gifts. Won't you allow him today to take your hand, to look in your eyes, and to say to you, "I love you, my child, with an everlasting love."