

“COME HOME FOR CHRISTMAS (#4): COME HOME TO LOVE”

(Psalm 89:1-4)

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[PROP NEEDED: Video Clip from “A Charlie Brown Christmas”]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 12-18-11]

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1. (Advent Candle Text: Luke 1:26-33) -- Read Text: Psalm 89:1-4 and Pray.
2. **[WATCH VIDEO from “A Charlie Brown Christmas” ... (0:23:15-0:24:17) -- “It’s not such a bad tree, after all. Maybe it just needs a little love...” -Time: 1:02]**

A--Well, isn’t that what we *all* need, not only at Christmas but all year long, as well... “*just a little love*”? ...a place where we can be accepted us just as we are, warts and all.

B--Well, that’s exactly what today’s two scriptures (Luke 1 & Psalm 89) invite us to experience & celebrate -- Verse 1 of Psalm 89 says “*I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever...*”.

1--You know, in today’s world of cynicism, jealousy, and hate, perhaps more than any other thing, we’re a people in need of true love.

2--Not the romantic, sentimental, selfish love of the kind so often sold on TV and on the internet, but a “*steadfast, faithful*” love described in today’s scripture which puts others and *their* needs ahead of our own.

C--So, as we continue our series "Come Home for Christmas," today I’d like us to “*Come Home to Love*” as the fourth of our five spiritual postures/attitudes that can help us once again experience the true meaning of the holidays.

D--And I want to do this by using today’s scriptures to offer 2 brief observations & challenges regarding this kind of “love” that I’m calling “*Christmas Love*” – not because of the time of year that we happen to be talking about it, but because it’s the kind of love that God demonstrated on that *first* Christmas, & which He wants us to pass on to others *all year long*.

--II--

3. The first observation and challenge I want to make is that true “Christmas Love” must always take **TANGIBLE FORM**.

A--For instance,...

1--In Verses 3-4 of Psalm 89, the writer celebrates God’s “*steadfast love*” specifically through the spiritual covenant He made with King David, to “*establish [his] descendants forever, and build [his] throne for all generations.*”

2--And in the Luke 1 passage (read during the Advent wreath lighting), we hear the angel telling Mary “*You will conceive in your womb and bear a son... He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High... and of his kingdom there will be no end.*” ¹

B--My point, of course, is that authentic, Godly “love” is never exists in a vacuum as mere intangible, ethereal sentimentalism, but instead *always* expresses itself in *concrete, tangible ways*, whether it be in the form of a covenant with David, or the birth of God’s son Jesus (the very *reason* we celebrate Christmas in the first place!)

C--And that means that the “love” *WE* have during the Christmas holidays should likewise *not* be just some generic, emotional feeling which hovers in the air somewhere, but should also have a *tangible* focus and expression towards others with whom we can share God’s love.

D--Listen to these words that appear on my blog today and see if they help you better connect what I’m talking about to Christmas [READ “*1 Corinthians 13 - Christmas Version*”]...

“If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls, but do not show love to my family, I’m just another decorator. If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family, I’m just another cook. If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love to my family, it profits me nothing. If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties and sing in the choir’s cantata, but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point. Love stops the cooking to hug the child. Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the husband (or wife). Love is kind, though harried and tired. Love doesn’t envy another’s home that has coordinated Christmas China and table linens. Love doesn’t yell at the kids to get out of the way. Love doesn’t give only to those who are able to give in return, but rejoices in giving to those who can’t. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. Video games will break, pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust. But giving the gift of love will endure.” ²

4. Now, second thing I think we learn about “*Christmas Love*” from today’s scriptures is that – if it’s *real* -- it will **MAKE A DIFFERENCE** not only in our *own* lives but also in the lives of *others*.

A--It makes a difference, *in our OWN lives*, first of all, by giving us a thankful heart.

1--In the Psalm 89 reading (Verses 1-2), we heard how God’s “*steadfast love*” prompted the writer to “*sing*” of that love, and “*with [His] mouth... [to] proclaim [and declare God’s] faithfulness to all generations*” – in other words, it’s was God’s love that created a thankful heart/spirit within the writer.

2--I wonder if one of the reasons we tend to take blessings for granted in our own culture today is that we don’t possess enough genuine *love* in our lives.

- a. Oh, we've got all kinds of things that *masquerade* as "love."
- b. But what we're missing is the real thing that only God can give, and which can create in us a heart of true thankfulness.

B--And not only does this "*Christmas Love*" make a difference in our *own* lives, but if it's real, it should also make a difference *in the lives of OTHERS* by enabling *them* to experience the genuine love of God which is so often missing.

1--Think back to our video clip again: ...there are many people (including at times many of us here today) who sometimes feel just like Charlie Brown's little Christmas tree... small, insignificant, beaten down by life, worthless.

2--There are many who regularly feel left out, discarded, and like outcasts by our world today -- those whom we in Christian circles sometimes call the "least" and the "lost."

3--And yet, like Charlie Brown's tree, with a little true love shown towards us, we can become something/someone very beautiful and special.

- a. It's what happened to Mary in today's Luke 1 reading – she questioned how she – a "nobody" peasant girl -- could be the bearer of God's son.
- b. And yet, the angel helped her to see that God's power and love could change that "nobody" into a "somebody"

4--More than ever, you see, Christmas is a time for us to practice the love of God towards others, especially towards those typically forgotten by the rest of the world.

C—And doing so not only makes a difference in *their* lives, but in *our own* lives, as well.

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5. The bottom line is that when the Psalm writer invites us to "*sing of [God's] steadfast love*", he's reminding us that that "Christmas Love" (the kind that is steadfast, faithful, and self-less) is to be the defining mark/characteristic of our Christian faith and behavior.

A--That it should always take *concrete/tangible form* through what we say, how we treat each other, and through what we do.

B--And by doing so, it should always make a difference not only in our *own* lives, but also in the lives of *others* around us.

C--It should be the "sign" by which all people know that we are Christians, as Christina Rossetti Explains in the final verse of her Christmas hymn "*Love Came Down At Christmas*":

*"Love shall be our token; love be yours and love be mine;
Love to God and neighbor; love for prayer and gift and sign."* ³

6. This holiday season, how will you practice “Christmas Love” in your life? How will you “Come Home for Christmas” by “Coming Home to Love”?
7. [PRAY: *“O God, it’s so easy to get caught up in all the hustle and bustle of the contemporary Christmas season -- the gift getting and gift wrapping and shopping -- that we forget about Love. We forget that the first Christmas was all about YOUR Love given to us in the form of a tiny baby (your Son), and that because of Him, Christmas today should be about that same Love given to us to pass on to others. Forgive us, O Lord, when we’ve made Christmas more about “things” than about Love. By the power of your Holy Spirit, enable us once more to allow YOUR Love to flow through us to others this season through what we say and what we do. Lord, in the days and months ahead, help us to truly “Come Home to Love.” For it’s in the name of your holy son Jesus that we pray this, Amen.”*]
8. [11am CLOSING HYMN: #242, “Love Came Down At Christmas”]

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ One of the best-know Bible verses describes God’s greatest tangible expression of love in this way: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16).
- ² We find another example of Paul’s words later in 1 John 4:20-21, *“Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”*
- ³ Vs.#3 of *“Love Came Down At Christmas,”* The United Methodist Hymnal#242 (Christina Rossetti, 1883).