

Sunday December 22, 2024
Fourth Sunday of Advent

Sermon: Love!

I can't believe that it is already the fourth week of Advent. It's been quite a journey over the last few weeks.

First we talked about hope, and our call to be bearers of hope in the world. But what exactly is the basis of our hope? What underlies our hope? I'm glad you asked. For me, the basis of our hope is love, specifically that we are loved. I know people who do not have a sense that they are loved, by anyone. I find this beyond sad; it's tragic. They don't feel that they are loved because they feel that they are unlovable; they are undeserving of being loved. And so, they exist, no more, just exist, from one day to the next, and if they don't make it to the next day, well, it's no great loss, because they are not loved, or so they believe. Without knowing that they are loved, they assume that they don't matter in the grand scheme of things. In the process they fail to love; primarily they fail to love themselves, and that is the tragedy.

Knowing that we are loved provides us with a sense of safety, a sense of security, a sense of worth. Micah's words are about the care that God will take of the people of Israel. God will raise up a ruler who, like a shepherd, will care for God's flock, standing over them, protecting them, and feeding them, ensuring all have what they need to survive. God's promise is one of security and peace, not just military security, but food security, and future security. These are thoughts that inspire a sense of being cared for, a sense of worth.

The second week of Advent we talked about peace, and our call to pave the road to peace with acts of righteousness and distributive justice. Of course, the power behind those acts is love: love of others. Here is where the tragedy of those who don't even love themselves gets amplified. If you don't love yourself, it would constitute a miracle if you were able to love someone else. Love of others is predicated on love of self, and that is dependent on knowing that you are loved. Of course, there is another pitfall here. I know people who love themselves too much; in fact they love themselves so much that they don't love anybody else; everything is about them. When everything is about 'me' distributive justice goes out the window, and peace goes with it. No, in order to pave the road to peace, in order to perform acts of righteousness and justice, we need to love others, just as Jesus loved us. And how did Jesus love us?

Unconditionally. Our ability to work for distributive justice and to strive for peace is dependent on unconditional love of others.

Last week we talked about joy. Joy would be impossible without hope and without peace, and they are dependent on love. But what is it that we rejoice in? In a word, relationships. When another person realizes that they are loved, unconditionally, even by someone they don't know, even if they feel they are undeserving, then they are filled with awe and joy. And when I have had a hand in that, I am, in turn, filled with awe and joy. For example, seeing the look of joy on the faces of the Croation family when they received their nativity set left me with a profound sense of joy. I was only the person who was handing them the nativity set. I was only an agent of God's grace. My joy was being able to witness God's grace at work in their lives.

That is the basis of the magnificat; Mary's response to news of who the child she is bearing is to become. It is a response based on her relationship with God, and on God's relationship with the people of Israel. It is a response of great joy. As Christians, our joy is tied to our relationship with God. This is the reason for joy this season as we anticipate the coming of God once again into our world, into our lives.

Love is the basis of our hope. Love is the motivation behind our acts of righteousness and justice that lead to peace. Love is the source of our joy. Catholic Priest, philosopher, paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) once said, "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire." May it be so. Amen.