



# ADVENT CONSPIRACY

## Love All — Enlarging Our Hearts

John 13:34-35

Sermon Outline based on a sermon by Andy Hein, former IJM Director of Church Mobilization.

*This sermon is one in a four-part series encouraging congregations as they join the [Advent Conspiracy](#) and Give More, Spend Less, Worship Fully and Love All.*

### Scripture Reading

- **Reader #1:** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- **Reader #2:** Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.
- **Reader #3:** For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son
- **Readers #1, 2, & 3 together:** We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard
- God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up
- And the son loved his own who were in the world, he showed them the full extent of his love
- The Son proclaimed good news to the poor... freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and set the oppressed free
- God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- So that whoever believes in the Son shall not perish but have eternal life.
- For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable,
- Love one another as the Son has loved you—
- The world will know that you are the Son's disciples, if you love one another
- So be rooted and established in love, that you may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the Son's love, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

## 1. Introduction

- Our capacity to love is determined by the amount of love we have. Advent is God's expression of and a lesson in love. Advent is reminder of God's love that is available for all to receive, anywhere, anytime.
- **This advent, our goal is for God to increase our capacity to love so that we can actually "love all" the way God loves all.** Only God can transform our hearts to be more like his this morning
- Illustration: *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*
  - The classic Christmas story "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" describes the Grinch's problem: "*That the most likely reason of all... may have been that his heart was two sizes too small.*" I'm like the Grinch: my heart could use a little expanding
  - The moment of change: "*Well, in Whoville they say that the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day. And then, the true meaning of Christmas came through, and the Grinch found the strength of ten Grinches, plus two!*"
- We need to enlarge our hearts! We need to increase our capacity for love! But we can't just make this happen – we need God to make it happen.
  - Mark Labberton writes in *The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbor*, "The greatest hope for the human heart is the heart of God."

## 2. Receive God's Love

- How to enlarge a heart: Receive both the universal truth and personal experience
  - God's Spirit reveals and makes real God's love to us in both the universal and the personal.
  - *The universal truth of God's love:* The Spirit reveals the truth about this baby Jesus, who he is, from where he came, why, in Scripture.
  - *The personal experience of God's love:* The Spirit also makes us alive as we experience the power of God personally in our heart.
  - Enlarging our hearts takes an experience of both – with our head/intellect, and with our heart/soul
- So, let's pause from the hectic pace of the season to receive God's love revealed in Advent. Consider:
  - Baby Jesus – the eternal creator of the heavens and earth; King of kings and Lord of lords – born into poverty, to an unwed teenager, in a little town
  - The baby was not just born "to" Mary and Joseph but "given" to the world, all the world. What father "gives" his newborn son away? That's what God's love did, and so Paul writes, "He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all..."
  - Pause long enough to ponder the birth of this baby Jesus – that God actually *gave* his son to the world, this world! It becomes more and more breathtaking!
- Illustration: *The Grand Canyon*
  - No one stands on the edge of the Grand Canyon and looks out on that mile deep, 10-mile wide, 300-mile long ravine and thinks, "Eh, I could dig that." No! Every person has the same response: "Wow, that's *awesome*." But it doesn't matter how good of a photographer you are, 1000 photos of that Canyon will never produce the same sense of awe in another person like physically standing there. It has to be experienced firsthand! The natural response to all that beauty and glory is worship. We are hard-wired for it.
  - The same is true of Advent! You have to experience it personally. What do you see when you peer into that manger? What is your response?
- I wonder what it would have been like to be one of those shepherds who came to worship the baby Jesus.

- Did they get to hold the child in their arms? Holding the Creator of the Universe would intimidate me. Maybe God would smile and say, “It’s okay, go ahead, hold him, I’ve given him to *you*.” Can you imagine that?
- These shepherds may have been the lowest on the social totem pole, but they had sense enough to know they had been in the presence of royalty and “returned, glorifying and praising God.” The shepherds went away changed because they encountered the Living God in truth and spirit –in a baby!
- Exercise –*Pause to pray.*
  - *Allow for some silent time for congregants to stand before the manger in their own heart. Invite them to contemplate and give thanks for the beauty, wonder, and miracle of the incarnation.*
- The first step to loving like God loves is to have our hearts enlarged by him through a personal encounter with Jesus – even the baby Jesus. When we do, our compassion will flow from God’s compassion, and our actions will match God’s desires.

### 3. Love is the New Standard

- The birth of any baby is a miracle! Who hasn’t held a newborn and looked into its tiny face and wondered over the potential – “What will you do in your life on earth?” Baby Jesus, however, is the Creator of earth! He is the newborn Prince of the one true Kingdom, that Kingdom which was lost to us earthlings in the Garden so long ago. He has come to reclaim his rightful ownership of his Kingdom, a Kingdom utterly foreign to us and unlike any other. When we receive God’s love, not only are we changed, our identity and citizenship changes.
- The Kingdom Jesus taught and showed was an upside-down and inside-out world, where
  - The poor are rich
  - The last are first
  - The foolish are wisest
  - The meek are powerful
- Jesus initiates us into this new Kingdom.
  - “You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.” Eph. 2:19
  - When is the last time you looked in the mirror and said to yourself, “You are “...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” 1 Peter 2:9.
- God’s love is good for us! And the good that God has bestowed upon us is intended for the good of others. Did you catch the phrase that we are to “declare the praises of him?” in 1 Peter 2:9? What does that look like?
  - Jesus’s example: “Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.” John 13:1
  - As he was facing his own arrest, trial and painful death on a Roman cross, what was on his mind? Making sure his friends had one last example of how to live as ambassadors of his Kingdom. He washed each of the disciple’s feet. Then, after he was done, he said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34-35
- First, we receive God’s love we get to trade our rags for the riches of the eternal Kingdom. Next, Jesus gives us a clear command: love one another as I have loved you.

#### 4. Love All

- The rabbis of Jesus' days had for generations taught that we are to love our neighbor. This was not a new teaching or even in question. What the rabbis asked was, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus responded with stories:
  - One story involved a man on his way to Jericho who was beaten, robbed, and left to die on the side of the road. In the story, remember it was the unlikely Samaritan who crossed the road and risked danger to his own life by picking the wounded victim up, caring for him, paying for his recovery, and asking nothing in return.
  - In another story Jesus says, *"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."* Matt. 25: 35-36
- Love all is easy when I have warm fuzzy feelings towards the person I'm supposed to love, or when I'm getting something in return. Like we often want to, the Pharisees hoped they could draw a circle around the people who were 'reasonable' to love.
  - But Jesus showed their circle was too small. We all have love circles. People inside get loved. People outside get, well, something else.
- Jesus says the true test of my love is the love I give to neighbors outside my circle, those who are offensive, those with different value systems, with different beliefs, and different gods and especially to those who are in need.
  - Yes, Jesus loved all, but he made it clear that he was sent *"...to preach good news to the poor... proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed."* Luke 4:18
  - The Church's role for 2,000 years: continue God's mission.
- And so when there are people in need of hearing the story of the Gospel, the followers of Jesus are called to go to them and share the Good News with them. When people are suffering from diseases, the people of God will love them by sending doctors and setting up medical clinics. When people are dying from starvation or lack of water, God calls his people to show up with food and drill for clean water. And when people are oppressed and exploited by those who have power and abuse that power to steal the good things, the Bible makes it clear that God expects his people to show up on behalf of the victims and restrain the hand of the oppressors.
- What great acts of love will define your Advent this year? God will increase your heart size, but it is up to you to exercise it! Your love is like a muscle – if you don't work it, will grow flabby! Loving those outside your circle is a great workout for the heart!
- Sometimes, a good way to love people way outside our circles is to connect with and love the people who are already loving them – it's how we can effectively get outside of our circles! This is one of the reasons that we're partnering with International Justice Mission this Advent. They are actively seeking justice on behalf of victims of violence – they're serving people who are physically far from us – far from our circles. They are freeing slaves, rescuing girls trafficked to brothels, freeing innocent people from prison. Though these victims are far from us, we can love people like our friends at IJM well – and they can spread that love to our neighbors around the world. Remember Michael's story that we heard a few weeks ago? The man who waited innocently in prison for a defender? Remember Suhana's story that we watched last week? The girl who was rescued after being trafficked into sexual exploitation not once but twice? They're far away from us, but because we're loving and supporting IJM well – we're loving and supporting *them*.
  - *You may want to show another IJM video at this point to introduce your congregation to another person they are loving from afar – get videos at [Youtube.com/IntlJusticeMission](https://www.youtube.com/IntlJusticeMission)*

## 5. **Conclusion**

- I want my capacity to love be greater this Advent than it was last Advent. Advent is God's expression of his love for me, and I want to open my heart and take in as much as I can!
- I am going to shout for joy with the Shepherds and worship with joy because I know this baby is God's son given to be my Savior.
- And finally, I am going to keep my eyes fixed on Jesus as I *love all* this Advent.