

A New Love

Scripture 1 John 4: 7-21
Date December 20, 2020

REQUESTED NARRATIVE

In the midst of this pandemic world many are troubled by their present and future realities. All the stories that are heard in the news are discouraging. The limitations and restrictions of our society have greatly hampered our ability to gather together for Christmas celebrations and New Year's parties. We ask ourselves what parts of these 2020 celebration can we actually love? How can the story of Christmas actually be celebrated?

RECORDED NARRATIVE

ADVENT - CHRISTMAS STORY

Yet - even in this Covid 19 world many still have continued Christmas rituals and traditions. Many have still put up Christmas decorations and lights and advent calendars are being used and Christmas candies are being snacked on.

Many have even dug out their Christmas Nativity Scenes / Chreches that remind us of the story of Jesus' birth on earth. The characters of Mary and Joseph, Shepherds and Magi, Angels and of course the baby Jesus.

The text reminds us of the story that God IS Love and that God's love was seen in the person and work of Jesus Christ. His love for us as He taught of God's kingdom, His love for us as He died on the cross and His love that remains in the hearts of those who believe.

It is a story that doesn't tire or fade. It is a story that remains powerful and true regardless of our restrictions. It is a story filled with characters that bring life and faith to us and characters that we love.

STAR WARS STORY

Over the past weeks Maranatha has been exploring the Star Wars movies as illustrations for our journey through Advent 2020. All good stories have memorable characters and lines and Star Wars has some great characters and some great quotes within the movie series. Good stories are compelling and inviting because of their power to draw the viewer in.

Many fell in love with the romance of Han and Lei where – in different movies – they declare their love for each other. We fell in love with the love / wisdom of character named Rose in the Last Jedi who proclaimed - *We're going to win not by fighting what we hate but by saving what we love.* These characters, their words and their deeds are inspirational and give us life.

REDEMPTIVE NARRATIVE

STAR WARS

But perhaps the greatest part of the inspiration of Star Wars go beyond the characters and the quotes and find their heart in the story lines of the movies. The growth of characters – indeed even the redemption of characters in the movies draws us deeper into the narrative. Anakin Skywalker starts as a little kid but grows into a brooding teenager seeking identity and direction and then evolves into Lord Vader – creating chaos and confusion. The cycle of redemption is fulfilled when his son – Luke Skywalker – breaks the power of evil within him and Vader becomes Skywalker again.

This redemptive narrative arc is what – I think – draws so many people to stories – Star Wars or otherwise. The potential goodness drawn to a darker identity and yet the power of good redeems them back into a full and vibrant life.

ADVENT - CHRISTMAS

The Christmas story – also speaks of the redemptive narrative to us – even today. Even in our Covid context, even in our consumerist culture - the redemptive nature of the nativity – of Jesus Himself draws people into it.

Jesus story begins at the manger and moves through the cross and John illustrates this in his letter to the church. God as the author and perfecter of love who sent Jesus to illustrate perfect love in His life. In Jesus' death on the cross our redemption was made possible and in His resurrection His love dwells within us. We then are called us to live a redemptive life of love – in the name of Jesus and in the power of Jesus to the world around us.

There is a power of belief and faith at Christmas that many people acknowledge in ways that they won't at other times of the year or in other ways of the world. Maybe it is the image of a baby or maybe it is the image of innocence. Perhaps it is the power of angels or the humility of shepherds or even the hunger of the magi – wisemen. Perhaps its any or all of these that we see ourselves as part of the story that calls out to us – in love – to respond.

RESPONSIVE NARRATIVE

NARRATIVE INVITATION

A good story calls the reader / listener to engage. To become part of the story – even a fiction story. There are many in this world who have fully engaged themselves in the Star Wars realm – even seeing as part of their reality. The love the power of the force and the hope, peace, joy and love it provides for them.

Yet the love found in the nativity story also calls us to a passion and involvement. Verse 16 is key for us today - *For we know and rely on the love that God has for us.* The newer NIV translates it this way but many others have it as know and believe in the love God has for us.

However, I think that the narrative allows both ! In that there is a progression of faith evident here. We Know about God - the same way that we know the characters in the story. Jesus, Mary, Joseph etc. We know about God and His love but we are called to move beyond knowing ABOUT God into a space of believing IN God. We believe that Jesus death on the cross is true and that Jesus resurrection is true. We believe in the redemptive narrative for us – to be true.

But here’s where I think the NIV does have great strength. The concept of rely can be forgotten in the story of our faith. We know ABOUT God - we believe IN God - but perhaps we struggle with our reliance ON God.

Yet because of God’s love for us - all of this IS possible. To know, to believe and to rely upon God’s love for us becomes our hope, our peace and our joy as we rely on His love. How else can we live in / through Covid, in / through consumerism and in / through the brokenness of this world without God’s strong love in us and for us.

In conversations with faith members of our church I compiled some quotes on their view of love from God and for God:

Love is God putting up with our stupidity

If Jesus hadn’t come to earth – where would we be? Lost forever

Love others as God has loved us

Love is being connected with family / friends

Loving is respecting one another- regardless of where they are at in life and regardless of who they are in life.

Love is durable

Love is enduring

CHRISTMAS INVITATION

Many years ago my future wife asked me to join her in binge watching the middle three episodes of Star Wars. Even though I wasn’t really liking the movies – I really did like her – so I did this with her. That became a significant part of the story of our relationship. However, in the years since that Saturday afternoon / evening much more of our story was written. A story that was less about the Star Wars characters and more about the Son of God and our place in His story. We’ve created our own memorable quotes but mainly it’s been more about the love between us that is framed from the love of God – in us and for us.

The narrative story of Advent is a journey to Christmas where we pause to reflect upon God’s presence amongst us – for us – in us. It is also a journey to Christmas where we pause to accept God’s presence for us – in us and through us to the world around us. It is a journey of faith to know more, to believe more and to rely on God more.

AMEN

