

“Unspeakable Love”

Micah 5:2-5a; Heb. 10:8-10; Luke 1:46-55

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Today marks the last Sunday of Advent... one which is known by the candle we lit earlier as the Advent Sunday of LOVE. It is fitting that after those previous Sundays which have names synonymous with the person and character of Jesus... Hope, Peace, and Joy... we close with one whose ‘keyword’ is perhaps the most appropriate: LOVE. Aside from the term “forgiveness,” there may be no more accurate word to describe the essence of our Lord and Savior than LOVE. As in, ‘unconditional love.’ As in, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...”

The interesting thing I noticed in reading the passages for this Sunday focused on God’s **love** for us is that NOWHERE in any of them was that word actually USED! And as I pondered further on that seemingly odd paradox, it occurred to me that it perhaps wasn’t at all so odd. That as we ponder the level of compassion that the Father would have for us to allow his Son to take human form, and be subject to the incredible persecution and horrible death He would suffer, you could say that there ARE no words to adequately describe such deeply sacrificial action.

And yet, though that particular 4-letter word... which in and of itself, is not an easy one to define in human terms, let alone, Divine... is not mentioned one time in these verses, they do indeed speak quite well to reassure us of just HOW much our God cares for us. Even when our own words, our own wisdom and strength, fail us. As Paul reminded the church in Rome, ***“the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”*** (Romans 8:26)

Today, may that same Spirit speak to us, and through us. By the power of the Spirit, may God hear our ‘wordless groans.’ May HIS ‘Word’ to us speak to how when our words may fail, our actions must not! From the Virgin Mary to the Prophet Micah, may they help us to grow in our limited human understanding of the **“Unspeakable Love”** that our Lord God has for us. Please join me in prayer...

[You have spoken to us through your Holy Word, Loving Father. We pray that your Spirit will take that Word and bring it to fresh bloom and fruition in our finite, human hearts and minds.

“May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, You who are our Rock, our Strength and our Redeemer.” AMEN!

We begin with our Luke passage, where Mary begins with that classic statement, ***“My soul magnifies the Lord.”*** (v. 46) These verses are commonly referred to as ... “The Magnificat.” Which is the Latin word for ... ***“magnifies.”*** Let us think for a minute what that word means. To ‘extol, laud.’ To ‘intensify,’ or ‘increase in significance.’ Or, more simply, to **make** something **larger**, more **easy to see**. What a great word to describe what Mary wanted to communicate: to ‘extol’ God’s virtues, to ‘laud’ His name... to ‘increase in significance’ the miracle that she was given the honor of participating in. She wanted others to see that she was truly ‘living large’ for God... that others might see not merely some ‘unwed young mother,’ but the God who had chosen her to bring this miraculous life into the world.

We should not lose sight of the ‘humble estate’ of this servant. In the words of the Advent Conspiracy, the book whose study we will conclude this afternoon... and hopefully, to BEGIN to practice what it preaches... she is described in this way:

“Mary was a teenage girl engaged to a poor carpenter named Joseph. She lived on a dusty fringe of the mighty Roman Empire, just another powerless peasant in another insignificant town. Yet she was the young woman to whom God extended the invitation to be the mother of the Messiah, Jesus.”

Knowing full well her low status as a ‘powerless peasant’ from an ‘insignificant town,’ it was certainly not lost on this teenage fiancé of a ‘poor carpenter’ just how MUCH God had ***“looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.”*** Her ***“spirit rejoiced in God her Savior,”*** for His LOVE for her was CLEAR.

While the FULL impact of the GIFT bestowed on her was yet to be realized, in her own way she knew that the ancient promises of God spoken through prophets like Micah were being fulfilled IN HER.

This child she would bear came, in his words, to **‘feed his flock’**... to allow them to ‘live **secure**’... to bring them **‘peace.’** From Micah to Mary to US, our very lives are also given to MAGNIFY the Lord, and REJOICE in God our Savior...because of His **“Unspeakable Love”** for us. We must be mindful of how we ‘speak’ to others of that love... without words...

One way that we 'magnify' the 'love' of Jesus is to **'feed his flock.'** (Mic 5:4)

We are to serve today like Jesus did then... the One who **"filled the hungry with good things."** (Luke 1:53) We should remember that Jesus 'fed his flock' both figuratively and **literally**. From his hospitality to the wedding party at Cana, where he turned the water into wine, to the Feeding of thousands with a mere few loaves and fishes, to the seaside fish BBQ that Jesus served His disciples after His resurrection, our Lord was very much concerned about taking care of people *physically* as well as spiritually.

Jesus knew that our ability to **hear** Him, and **respond** to His truths, can pass directly through our stomachs. Or through holes in one's roof. Or through one's rear end which sits on concrete because they HAVE no 'roof' over their heads. Sure, we are called to teach others HOW to fish... for life... but if they are too distracted by their physical hunger TODAY... FIRST we must give them a fish. How can we, with a straight face, speak to a person of the importance of being in God's house, when they don't have one of their own to live in. From the hungry to the homeless, before we SPEAK of the love of Christ, we must first SHOW the love of Christ... By what we DO for others.

As we take care of others physical needs, we also must care for their spirits, their emotions. We SHOW that 'unspeakable love' of Christ by the manner in which we affirm that **"They shall live secure."** (Micah 5:4) How do we follow in Christ's pattern of encouragement, who **"lifted up the lowly"** (Luke 1:52)?

We lift up those who are feeling 'lowly' by living by the example of Jesus: We **Listen**. We give people a **safe space** to share their burdens. We strive to be **Non-judgmental**. We create an atmosphere of **TRUST**. A place where the hurting can **"live secure."** In the words of the epistle of James... a book that is all about how our ACTIONS must bear witness to our FAITH... he says, **"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."** (James 1:19) From how ready we are to listen and not to judge, before we SPEAK of the love of Christ, we must first SHOW the love of Christ... By who we ARE for others.

Most of all, we must not forget where our ability to SHOW the love of God comes from. The reason we can DO for others... 'filling the hungry with good things' ... the strength we find to

lift up those who are lowly by listening and loving them... is only through the One who is greater than any other: JESUS. In the words of German philosopher Martin Buber, "Not I, but Thou." Or in the words of the OT prophet Zechariah, "**Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord.**" (4:7) Or, to quote from that prophet Micah once more, "**and he shall be the one of peace.**" (5:5a) All that we do is not merely by our own strength, but by the power of the One at work within us. Not 'I', but 'Thou,' O Lord. YOU are the One who brings us **peace**.

Mary attested to this peace, speaking to just how God worked miracles through his humble servant when she declared, "*Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.*" (Lk 1:48-49) How often do you and I make this same affirmation? For whatever trials we may have gone through, by virtue of you being in this place today, you are 'BLESSED!' That the "Mighty One had done great things for you and me.' And every day we should 'bless HIS holy name!'

And one of the most powerful ways we 'bless' the holy name of God is by acknowledging to OTHERS His central role in our lives. When someone thanks you for an act of generosity, or a kind word, or a listening ear, pray that you are led by God's Spirit to give credit where credit is due. A word from your 'spiritual sponsor,' if you will. Before we SPEAK of the love of Christ, we must first SHOW the love of Christ... By the Christ we SHARE with others. **The One who is our peace.**

As followers of our Lord Jesus, we are to SHOW His love... by what we DO for others, by who we ARE for others, by the Jesus we SHARE with others. Hard work sometimes... YES! But a HOLY calling, nonetheless. A responsibility to 'carry around with us' the Savior of the world, Jesus. A calling we should accept with the same peace and humility that Mary did. I would remind us all of the words from Hebrews we read earlier:

"It is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Heb. 10:10)

It is by God's will that you have been 'sanctified'...'made holy'...SET APART... Through the body of Jesus that dwells within you. And 'HE will give you peace.' That your 'faith may be bigger than your fears' because of the One you carry around with you, as Mary did. I

would leave you with this simple encouragement that reminds us of how we are not alone in ALL the ways you seek to serve God: **"HE>i"**.

If you're not familiar with this 'symbol,' it basically says, "HE is greater than I." (Kind of like Buber's 'Not I, but Thou'). This simple expression started in Hawaii, and has spread through the mainland on countless shirts and bumper stickers... and, in some occasions, a few wrists as well. [show bracelet] It is based in no small part to John 3:30: **"He must become greater and greater. I must become less and less."**

Our words to describe the greatness of the God we serve WILL fail us. We will fail to DO for others as we should. We will NOT be good listeners. We will neglect to give our Lord Jesus credit for all that He has done for us. But as we continue, in our own fallen ways, to show the Love of God **outward...** and **inward...** and **upward...** may we never forget that truth: **HE>i**. And that by the Spirit who **"intercedes for us through wordless groans,"** YOU will be a witness... to the **"unspeakable LOVE'** of Christ!!

CHARGE/BENE: In the Advent Scriptures we read on the way to that 'little town of Bethlehem,' many references are made to the people of **Israel**. A nation, whether ancient or modern-day, we can think has **little** to do with us here is SWLA. May we be mindful, however, of what that name means: **"Grapples with God."** Or **"fighter of God."** Which relates to the **struggle** that Jacob had with a 'stranger' by the River Jabbok, after which he was renamed 'Israel.' That leader of God's 'chosen ones' to great things for the 'One True God.'

HOWEVER, as one who is also a follower of that 'one true God,' you too have been 'chosen' to 'do great things' for Him. We too 'grapple with God.' Even 'fight' with Him. But no matter what 'struggles' we go through... no matter how hard it may be to witness to God's 'unspeakable love'... may we never forget

That **"HE>I"**. As you go forth on your journey to that humble manger of 'our dear Savior's birth,' know that you do not go alone. But that the Spirit of the Living God...