



Highcliffe and Bransgore **Methodist Churches**

Sunday 20th December 2020, 10:30am “Advent #4 – Love” John 14: 15-24

Prepared by Rev’d Phillip Dixon.

Welcome to the fourth and final Sunday of the Advent season. Advent means ‘a coming’, God coming to His people. Each year the season of Advent provides us, as Christians, with a special opportunity to connect with and celebrate God’s unfolding salvation/rescue plan for us. Advent has us looking in three directions at the same time (not an easy thing to do); looking back to the prophecies of the Old Testament leading to the promised birth of Jesus as Messiah in Bethlehem, secondly looking to the present day and living our lives with God’s salvation transforming us and thirdly looking forward to when Jesus will come again in power and glory.



Lighting the Advent Candle:

We light again the first candle in anticipation and feel hope rising up within us. We name it **HOPE**.

We light again the second candle as we choose to be a peaceful presence in the midst of a frantic and anxious world and call it **PEACE**.

We light again the third candle remembering that God has replaced our mourning with the oil of gladness, we name it **JOY**.

God’s love transforms the world and God’s promises are kept. So, as we light the fourth candle in eager expectation of God’s greatest promise fulfilled, we name this candle **LOVE**

Advent Hymn: Light a candle in a darkened place StF 174

Sing/read/pray/proclaim.

Light a candle in a darkened place,
in its flame see hope on every face,
Christ our Saviour will be born,
heralding a brand new dawn,
so let it burn.

In the darkness, see the coming light,
Word of God speaks through the darkest night,
keep a watch, the time is near,
time for hope and not for fear,
so let it burn

Stepping through each page of history,
prophets contemplate this mystery,
celebrate the coming King,
words of joy and hope they bring,
so let it burn.

In the desert now the waiting's done,
make things ready for your King, says
John, see his glory is revealed
and the hope for all is sealed,
so let it burn.

Mary found true favour with the Lord,
yet she trembled at his strange reward,
knew this was the special One,
hope for many through God's Son,
so let it burn.

Clare Stainsbury (b 1959)

Opening Prayer:

All powerful God,
let the splendour of your glory
rise in our hearts like the dawn,
that the darkness of the night be
scattered and the coming of your only Son
may reveal us as children of the light.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Advent 4 Collect from MWB

Song: There's a light upon the mountains

StF188 Sing/read/pray/proclaim words.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuvbW7gVwal&ab_channel=mkariobangi

There's a light upon the mountains,
and the day is at the spring,
When our eyes shall see the beauty
and the glory of the King;
Weary was our heart with waiting, and
the night-watch seemed so long,
But His triumph-day is breaking, and
we hail it with a song.

There's a hush of expectation, and
a quiet in the air;
And the breath of God is moving in

the fervent breath of prayer;
For the suffering, dying Jesus is the
Christ upon the throne,
And the travail of our spirit is the
travail of His own.

Hark! we hear a distant music, and
it comes with fuller swell;
'Tis the triumph song of Jesus, of
our King Emmanuel;
Zion, go ye forth to meet Him,
and my soul, be swift to bring
All thy sweetest and thy dearest for
the triumph of our King. Henry Burton (1840-
1930).

Prayer of Confession:

*if my people who are called by my name
humble themselves, pray and seek my face
and turn from their wicked ways, then I
will hear them from heaven and will
forgive their sin and heal their land.
2 Chronicles 7:14*

Let us pray:

Loving and forgiving God, we confess to
You our errors, our pride, our self-reliance
and our lack of love for those who you
have placed us with. Your word says we
must love You and our neighbour as we
do ourselves, we are sorry for the times
when that does not happen. For the times
when our good intentions are not
followed by the sacrifice of self. Father
forgive, **Christ have mercy.**

For the times when I have made being a
Christian a comfortable status, a
statement of attendance or belonging to a
club instead of a way of living my life for
You and helping others to do likewise.
Forgive me for the times when I have not
been a good witness to others. Father
forgive, **Christ have mercy.**

For the times when I have believed or not highlighted the false teaching that salvation is something to be achieved, a rule to be kept, a hoop to be gone through or a hurdle to be jumped over instead of a beautiful sacrificial gift that by Your blood You freely give. Father forgive, **Christ have mercy.**

For the schemes and plans of man, our use of the worlds techniques, thinking that they will result in the growth of our gatherings instead of a prayerful and loving obedience to You. For the sins of our world, for the aggression, the pollution, the racism, the greed and the immorality. Father forgive, **Christ have mercy.**

A time of quiet to listen to what God may be saying to us.

Almighty God, who in Jesus Christ has come down to us and offered us a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, thank you for the forgiveness of our sins, open our eyes to Your truth, strengthen us to do Your will in this Advent season and grant us the same deep and forgiving love that You have shown us. **Amen.** Absolution adapted from Church of England Common Worship

A Prayer for Love (Advent 4)

Heavenly Father, the whole meaning of Christmas can be explained in one little four-letter word -love. You sent your gift of pure love to us that first Christmas. Love descended from heaven to be born of a virgin. Love lay in the scratchy hay of a manger in a meagre barn in Bethlehem. All of your love, God, was robed in the delicate skin of a baby and wrapped in swaddling clothes. In this final week of Advent help us to reflect on the

magnitude of love that was made manifest in Your Son Jesus.

You are King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Messiah, and Ruler of All, yet you came not as a lion but as a lamb. You came as an innocent baby whose purpose was to walk this earth in complete love and then to sacrificially give your life as an atonement for the sins of your children. Emmanuel. God with us. Love in the form of a man.

There is no greater gift than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends. You willingly gave the gift of your life because of your love. Your righteous blood covered our sin. You redeem and restore us when we confess you as Lord and Saviour of our life. In that moment, you give us the gift of your love for all eternity. We receive grace upon grace and mercy upon mercy in that moment.

Father, in this final week of Advent, fill our hearts and minds with the significance of this truth. Thank you, Lord, for loving us enough to send Jesus. In Jesus' precious name we pray. **Amen**

Prayer: Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word and Holy Spirit, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Reading: John 14:15-24

¹⁵ 'If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept

him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.'

²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, 'But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?'

²³ Jesus replied, 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. New International Version UK

A time to pause, read again, pray, and reflect.

Preaching notes: There is a noticeable conditionality (if) and progression (and) as Jesus explains to His disciples (and to us as the hearers of this generation) that our response to the love that He offers us will lead us to "keep my commands". We hear this repeated 3 times in this passage (verses 15, 21 and 23) and we are left in no doubt as to its seriousness.

To know the commands of Jesus we can do no better than to start at Matthew 5-7. We can find His commands contained in His teaching throughout the Gospels

William Barclay says that it is surely impossible to love someone deeply without obedience. It is the obedience, reverence and trust that lies at the root of a relationship with God- recall the words of Proverbs 3:5-6 "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight*". Submitting to God is to be obedient, Barclay continues: "fellowship with God and the revelation of God are dependant on love: and love is dependant on obedience. The hymn writer John Henry Sammis must have had this passage in mind when he wrote: "Trust and obey, For there's no other way To be happy in Jesus, But to trust and obey".

The most perfect expression of love, unity and harmony is found in God and the Oneness of the Father, Son and Spirit (see verses 16,17,20,21,23 and 24). The birth of Jesus is an act of pure love from God, a present to a world that He loves, deeply and unconditionally.

The question asked by Judas (not Iscariot) is one which is so fundamentally important for our current age. An age where "participation rather than commitment" and "attending but not truly belonging" is encouraged. Receiving the Spirit of God (Spirit of Truth) is dependent on the obeying, trusting and loving God (with all of your heart and soul). The world cannot receive the Spirit because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. As you consider the conditionality of Jesus words we must remind ourselves that this love is offered to each of us, it is our own choice to accept or not. **Amen**

Song: From heaven you came StF272

Sing/read /pray/proclaim the words.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07hsmf5>

From heaven you came helpless babe
Entered our world, your glory veiled
Not to be served but to serve
And give Your life that we might live

*This is our God, The Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to The Servant King*

There in the garden of tears
My heavy load he chose to bear
His heart with sorrow was torn
'Yet not My will but Yours, ' He said.

Chorus

Come see His hands and His feet
The scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered

Chorus

So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him
each other's needs to prefer
for it is Christ we're serving

*This is our God, The Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to The Servant King* Graham
Kendrick (b 1950)

Gravity: A poem by Mark Greene

The apple, unlike Adam, had no choice but
to fall

Speeding to fulfil its Creator's call.

But what force drew Him down to us?

He, with a starlit infinity to explore,

He, who could peer into a neutron's core,

He who had spoken a thousand-million
times

And known the sulphuric spit of our self-
vaunting crimes,

He, who we called murderer, liar, thief

And left for dead with enlightened relief.

What force drew him down from above

To reap the grim harvest of rebel pride,

Hammered with nails of truth denied?

What force drew Him down from above?

What force but this: the gravity of love

Mark Greene

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your Kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom,
the power and the glory are yours.
Now and for ever. **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession:

Loving Father, as we draw near to the
time we celebrate Advent being revealed
in the birth of Jesus and the promise of
Your coming, we pray for our brothers and
sisters throughout this world who are
undergoing oppression, violence and
imprisonment for Your name. We pray for
all those organisations who support our
persecuted brothers and sisters and

particularly Lord for Your protection today over the Barnabas Fund who are undergoing threats and intimidation.

We pray for Your blessing Lord over Christians against Poverty, for the work they do in debt counselling and supporting those facing financial problems and hardship. For every family that is facing the fear or the reality of joblessness during this crisis, we pray Lord for Your peace to be with them, help them make the difficult decisions about what to cut back on. Most of all Lord we pray for the children and we thank you for organisations like the Christchurch Foodbank and for the many donations of food to the hungry.

Loving Lord, we pray that You will be with those for whom this Christmas will be the first without a wife, husband, father or mother or child. Comfort them Lord.

Lord we pray for this Christmas period to be a time of restoration of broken relationships; families broken and split by pride, jealousy or addictions, heal them Lord.

We bring our own concerns and add them to these prayers. Amen

Closing Song: Love Divine Sing/read or proclaim the words.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igs3mNspps1>

Love divine, all loves excelling
Joy of Heaven to Earth come down
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling
All Thy faithful mercies crown
Jesus, Thou art all compassion
Pure, unbounded love Thou art
Visit us with Thy salvation
Enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe, Thy loving spirit
Into every troubled breast
Let us all in Thee inherit
Let us find that second rest
Take away the love of sinning
Alpha and Omega be
End of faith, as its beginning
Sets our hearts at liberty

Come almighty to deliver
Let us all Thy grace receive
Suddenly return and never
Never more Thy temples leave
Thee we would be always blessing
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above
Pray, and praise Thee without ceasing
Glory in Thy perfect love

Finish then thy new creation
Pure and sinless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in thee,
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Blessing: Be people of love. Let love live in your heart and share the love of Christ with all you meet. Share love by loving those you see regularly. Start by loving your community. Share love by loving those you do not know. How do your actions affect the rest of God's creation? Share love by praying for our world. In this Advent season, we need to see, feel, and share love. As you go out into the wonder of God's creations, share love, joy, peace, and hope with all those you meet. **Amen.** LitugyLink.net

Phillip Dixon, December 2020. YouTube links are external resources and are provided to help you engage with the songs. Singing the Faith and Hymns and Psalms resources are provided under license: CCLI 178182