



***Three ways with Love***  
**Reverend Judith Wigglesworth**  
**Advent 4, 18 December 2016**  
***Isaiah 7:10-16***  
***Romans 1:1-7***  
***Matthew 1:18-25***

Today we light the fourth candle on our Advent wreath and reflect on the theme of Love as we wait upon God.

I wonder if you've noticed the recipes every so often in the Life magazine of Wednesday's Dominion Post, called "Three ways with...." Recently there's been "Three ways with fabulous feta", and "Three ways with Christmas baking"... These columns somehow appeal to me – they are seasonal, and usually straightforward!

As I have pondered and wondered my way through Advent this year, it has occurred to me that perhaps there are "Three ways with Love" at Advent.

First though, why love? Why is love part of our Advent waiting? Love is God's primary motive for the gift of Jesus Christ to the world. God created the world in love; God calls us to love God; and to love one another. The Summary of the Law says this:

*Hear the teaching of Christ: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And a second is this: you shall love your neighbour as yourself.*

This Summary of the Law is just that – a summary of what living in Christ means. And in Advent we wait for the coming of Jesus, the great gift of love from God to God's created people.

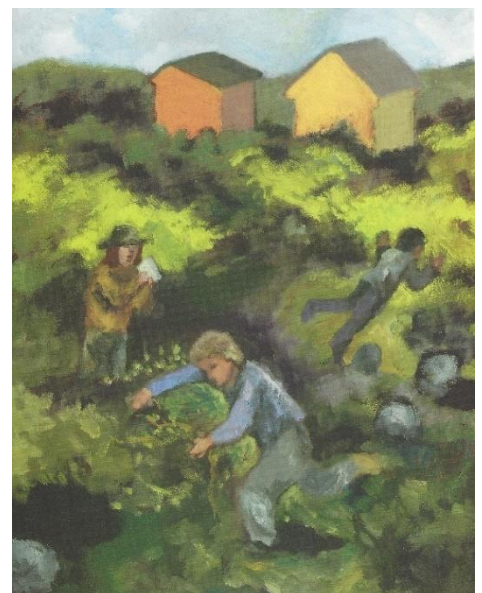
So how do we wait in love? First of all in Advent, we look behind us to Christ's first coming in to the world as a humble child; that shocking, unexpected way in which God came to earth. So as we journey towards Christmas we recall God's gift of love in Christ. Could this be one way with Love this Advent?

In Advent we also look ahead of us to Christ's second coming. Jesus himself spoke of his return, and urged his disciples to always be ready. So by looking forward, we're expectant of all that Christ will do as he comes again in the final fulfilment of God's love. Could this be a second way with Love this Advent?

What about the here and now? As we wait in Advent, we also sit between those two kinds of coming, somewhere after the "already" but still within the "not yet" of God's kingdom. Jesus Christ has already come in the flesh, already been crucified, already been resurrected. But we do not yet see the full effects of Christ's love played out in our world. Peace and justice are not universal. Our lives are not free from brokenness. Hunger, poverty, oppression and war still plague the earth.

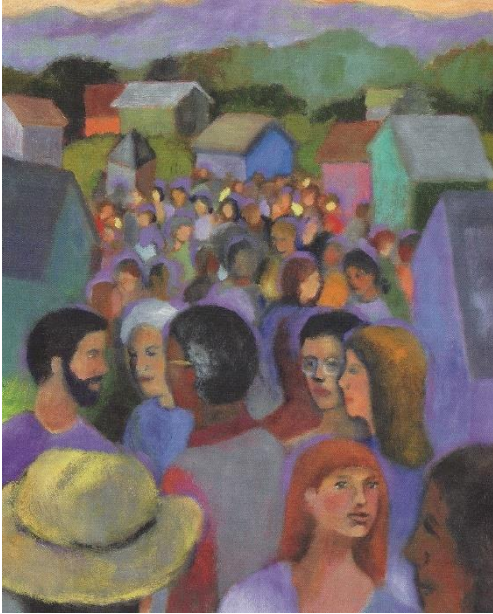
Therefore there is a third way with Love, because in Advent we have work to do while we wait and while we look both behind and ahead. For we are called to love, and to live lovingly, right now. And we do so, not so that God will love us, but rather because God already loves us. We love because "God first loved us" (1 John 4:19). To illustrate this third way with Love, I'd like to share with you a story.... <sup>1</sup>

It's a story of a people who lived in a town in windowless houses. There were no roads to get from place to place. Instead there were tall tangled weeds, deep holes and rocks all over the place. The people didn't go out much, they just stayed in their houses, closed up like boxes sealed with tape. They didn't like it, but they didn't know how to change it.



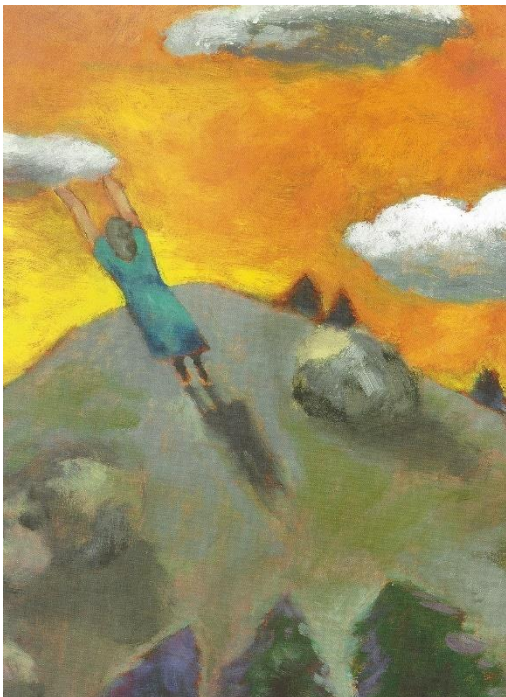
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<sup>1</sup> "God In Between" by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, 1998. Text summarised; some pictures used here.



Sometimes the people would meet in the centre of the town and try to figure out what to do. One person said “I have heard there is a God, and when people find God, God solves their problems”. Others thought that was ridiculous, but they could think of no other way to fix their town, so they decided to look for God. That wasn’t very easy, though, since there were no roads to get anywhere. However, on the edge of town there were two houses where a woman and a man lived, and their houses each had one

window. Because of this the townspeople called these two people “The Ones Who Could See Out Windows”. The townspeople figured that if these two people could see out windows, they would be the best people to go and look for God. So off they went.



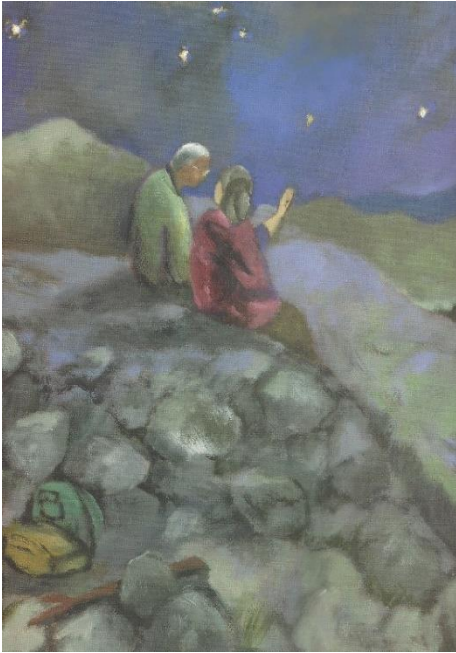
The woman went to a tall mountain, and later set sail on a ship, but couldn’t find God.

The man trekked through the burning hot desert, and ended up in a cave, but couldn’t find God.



After their journeying The Ones Who Could See Out Windows were tired. They sat on a rock one evening as they made their way back to the town and they talked. The woman put her cool hand on the man’s sunburnt arm, and the man wrapped his blanket around the woman. They talked all night and told each other their stories.

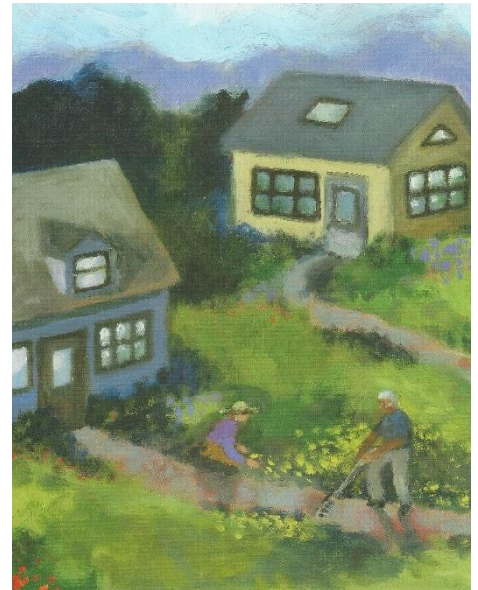




The next day they continued walking back to the town. The people eagerly came out to meet them. “Tell us”, they shouted, “Where is God?” The woman and the man told the townspeople about their journeys but how they couldn’t find God. The townspeople got angry and started complaining again about all their problems.

The woman and the man slipped away back to their own houses without anyone

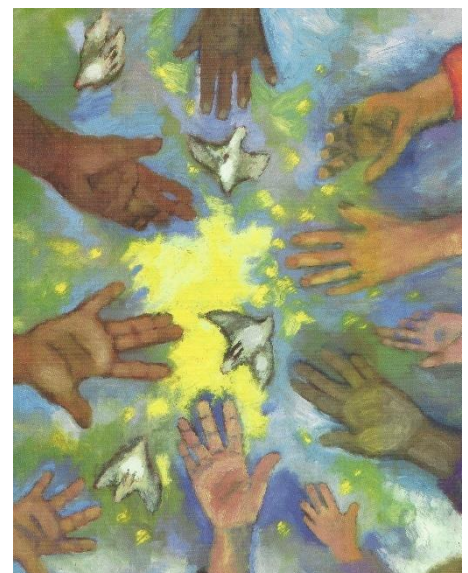
noticing. They started helping each other. They put extra windows in their houses. They cut their weeds, filled in the holes in the ground, and cleared the rocks to build a road between their two homes.



A while later, when the townspeople saw what has happening, they were stunned. “We have never been able to have any roads in this town, and we have never seen so many windows. How did you do that?” they asked. “With God’s help”, answered The Ones Who Could See Out Windows. “We journeyed hundreds of miles looking for God and then we found each other. And we discovered that God was with us”. The townspeople couldn’t understand. “But I can’t see God anywhere”, insisted one of the men in the town. “I just see you. If God is here, show us where”.

The Ones Who Could See Out Windows said “God is in the between. In the between. In between us.”

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The man and the woman in this story discovered the meaning of “Emmanuel – God with us”, as foretold by the prophet Isaiah.

They stepped out of their own small worlds and built new connections with one another. They discovered the love of a creative God was there in the space between them, just waiting to be expressed.

“Three ways with Love” this Advent calls us to love as we look back with thanksgiving, to love as we look forward with anticipation, and to love in the “in between”. That’s “in between” in time – between Jesus’ first and second coming, and “in between” in space – the space between us, here and now.

What sort of love is this love “in between”? God’s love for us is radical and entirely unmerited, yet given fully and freely. That’s the sort of love we are called to imitate. It’s pretty easy to love the people we like, those whom we feel comfortable with, and those we enjoy spending time with. But the love Christ calls us to isn’t necessarily safe or comfortable. As well as loving “close by”, we are called to love beyond the people nearest us, and beyond the places that are easiest to get to. It can be disquieting when we realise how easy it can be to get caught up in and perpetuate a situation that does not show love, or share love, or even think love. We are called to discover our capacity to love as fully and freely as God first loved us. Like The Ones Who Could See Out Windows, we are called to look for roads to build, windows to open, holes to fill in, and rocks to remove. And in doing so we make straight the way for the Lord, and glimpse the world that Isaiah foretold:

*‘Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.  
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’ (Isaiah 40:3-5)*

The vision of the God of Advent love is that all people shall see the glory of the Lord.

We have all received the apostolic commission, in the words of Paul, *“to bring people of all nations to faith and obedience in the name of Jesus Christ”*. (Romans 1:5)

God may be “between us”, but it’s up to us to pave the way for God’s glory to be revealed, one act of love at a time.

In the words of Michael Leunig:

*Love one another and you will be happy.  
It’s as simple and difficult as that  
There is no other way.*

Amen

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It’s as simple and difficult as that.  
There is no other way.*

