

LOVE II
Luke 1:26-38
Colebrook Congregational Church
4th Sunday of Advent 2015

There are things out there called “mega-churches.” These places are in fact designed to feel more like a theater or performance. You have probably seen some televangelists at some point. I am usually wary of them. If you see where they are broadcasting from, it is usually from inside a mega-church, with auditorium seating and huge projector screens. There is one thing about those types of places that I do like, though, especially because of today's and last week's selections. They have the ability to show or project images to go along with the parts of the service. Today's selection in the Gospel of Luke comes from verses just prior to the verses from last Sunday. It is called the Annunciation, and it has been a popular subject for artists. So, I had the thought that it would be nice to pop up an image of Botticelli's Annunciation up on the wall here. Or those photos from Dancers Among Us that I used last week.

But back to the selection. Luke has packed a lot of theological implications into those first two verses. First, Jesus is from Nazareth, so he is called a Nazarene, which sounds very close to Nazirite, a consecrated & holy person, like John the Baptist and Samson. Then Luke makes sure to mention that Mary is a virgin, which combined with the activity of the Holy Spirit, emphasizes the divine aspect of Jesus, which is essential to Jesus' sacrifice. Next comes Joseph, of the House of David, a royal house, from which the Messiah is prophesized to come from. It is like a foundation is being built, to help the listener understand the importance of Jesus and his ministry.

The selection continues to describe the Archangel Gabriel's interaction with Mary, how she is being favored by God to carry the Son of the Most High, who will assume the throne of David, and will rule over the house of Jacob forever. Jacob was the son of Isaac, grandson of Abraham, and the father of twelve sons from which the Twelve Tribes of Israel originate from. And Jacob is later renamed Israel, and that is how God's chosen people got their name. So Gabriel is telling Mary that her son Jesus will rule over God's faithful people. And the throne of David is important, because while David was not the first king of Israel, he was God's favorite, he was the most

powerful of all the kings of Israel, unifying the Tribes, and God made a promise to David, that the Messiah would be descended from him.

The theme for this final Sunday of Advent is the greatest of them all: Love. And while this selection is not explicitly about love, it is the announcement of an act of God's Love for us, the giving of Jesus, the Messiah, to us. And Love is raised up by Jesus as the Greatest Commandment, and as the one-word summary of the entire Old Testament.

In this holiday season, we can find Love in our assembled friends and family. A full house, full of life, full of bustle, full of commotion. And it is wonderful! Sure, the kitchen can end up in complete disarray, dishes in every room, and things not in their right places, but it is all worth it. That feeling of Love that just emanates from holiday gatherings makes the aftermath worth it, Love is that powerful.

We may sigh or roll our eyes at the mess. We may even long for that eerie or peaceful quiet that happens once everyone has left. But we are glad that the gathering happened, even looking forward to the next one.

Last week was the Holiday Fair, and a bunch of my friends came to be vendors. Shortly after the Fair opened, I used my new Nook to take a “selfie” with them, and then posted it online. Someone commented with one word: Family.

And in a way, he was right. These were close friends that I've known for years, and are like a second family to me. And we all have friends like that, who are considered family, even though they are not. Family by choice, not by blood, is the expression.

The ones from New Hampshire came down Friday night, and other friends from Torrington came up to see them as well. There was music, crafts, cooking, art, and playing with kittens. This was the first time that I have had houseguests here. Eventually, we all ended up sitting on the floor of the kitchen, talking and entertaining the kittens.

After the Fair cleanup, I had more people over, the rest of the vendors I am friends with, and some of the local steampunks. We christened the fire pit, then set about cooking our dinner. Chicken cacciatore with penne, Jodi's garlic and spinach pizza, prosciutto & mozzarella, and Italian bread. It was unseasonably warm that day, so we were able to use the three-season porch as a dining room for the first time.

The Parsonage was a chaos of voices conversing, or music, of kitties, and of food. It brought new life to the building! Of course, there was a mess, but I had learned some things from my dad about hosting. So I had planned ahead and as the meal ended, I had an empty dish washer waiting. And then we spent the rest of the night sitting around the table and couch with mugs of tea, shortbread cookies covered in chocolate, and laps full of kittens.

The New Hampshire people stayed another night, and we had breakfast in the store, the girl with three hair colors drawing many looks from the older gentlemen, and then they left.

My actual family also showed up during the Fair. My 4 month old nephew met Santa, my niece ran around town hall, and my Mom did a lot of Christmas shopping.

It was an exhausting weekend, but one filled with Love, coming from my family and friends who are like family. A Love that lifted my Spirit. The kind of Love that can lift anyone's Spirits. And as we enter the last few days of expectations of Jesus' birth, the embodiment of God's Love for us, we should remember to savor that feeling, that feeling of Love, when our family and friends gather.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

[PAUSE FOR SILENT PRAYER]

Gracious God, we give you thanks for the gift of love that you give us through Jesus. We pray that we are able to share Your love with anyone in need of it. As we approach the end of the Advent season, with our preparations for the celebration of Jesus' birth nearly ready, we pray that we remember why we are celebrating, and that no matter what happens as the day approaches, that we remember Your Love for us.

And we remember in our prayers:

We pray for everyone who needs you. We pray for those who are unwell, that they be healed, and we pray that you guide the hands of their caregivers. We pray for the homeless and for refugees and for those caught up in the violence of war. We pray that the barriers of difference may be broken down, and that we can welcome strangers into our hearts and lives and be found ready to provide shelter for them. We pray for people in broken relationships, for the lonely and the lost, and for those who feel abandoned and let down. May we bring comfort and support to those in need and find ways of caring for each other. We pray for all who suffer from any kind of dependency. May they find support to help them overcome and know that they are not alone. Help us to be a people who reach out to those in need. We pray for the grace to give and receive forgiveness for past wrongs. We pray for all who are bereaved. We pray that we may listen attentively and to find ways of helping those with their sorrows. We pray for those suffering any kind of loss. May we offer them our support. We offer all these prayers and those of our hearts, in Jesus' name, Amen.