

O Holy Night – Advent part 3

1. [tomorrow's Christmas Eve service] As we close in on Advent, let's look at the last verse of "O Holy Night." [ONE]
2. We've had 2000 years of Christianity. Some of those years went better than others. (crusades, inquisition, destruction of churches and icons) Still, after all this time, it is a radical idea to love one another.
3. Giving lip service to love is easy; we do it all the time. In the old Peanuts comic strip, the great theologian, Linus, said "I love mankind. It's people I can't stand." Right there with you, Linus.
4. Jesus went out of his way to show us that he was serious. He sought out the Samaritan woman, he adopted the woman with an issue of blood along the way to raise up man's daughter, he met at table with prostitutes and religious zealots. He showed us that God did NOT give us a duty to disapprove.
5. That "duty to disapprove" is a hard nut to crack. We know God is holy and He has called us to be holy...we just misunderstand what that means. It means showing patience, love, consideration, and a lack of judgmentalism to the "others" around us.
6. This is hard, for we are a tribal people (clans, rivers, football, politics). We are taught to demonize differences by our culture and media. Jesus step across every gap laid in front of him and calls us to follow him.
7. That love is an active, giving, sacrificial love. And it is his law (and, as such, it is God the Father's law). The OT was full of laws – 611 of them by most counts. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, his reply was: [TWO]
8. Have you ever wondered why anyone would ask what the greatest commandment was? The answer is that we are always trying to determine the essential, the irreducible minimum. This is because we have been led to believe that precision obedience is what God requires. Nadab and Abihu were trotted out to make sure we understand that God wanted every nut and bolt done exactly right or

we were lost. (never explained why others in that chapter were not killed) That made it hard to sell me on the idea that the word “gospel” means “good news.”

9. Jesus touched the unclean because they needed to be touched; love required it. He allowed himself to be touched by others because they needed to touch. He placed himself in uncomfortable places (starting with the womb and the manger, I would imagine) because we needed to meet him there. He said God was fine with David eating the bread that was given to God on the altar because, well, David was hungry.
10. Love trumped law in Jesus’ teaching. [THREE] As the song goes, “Truly he taught us to love one another. His law is love and his gospel is peace.”
11. The gaps between us were of great concern to Jesus. Rather than requiring us to place gaps between us, he opened up his arms to us. “Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother.” This was written by a Frenchman in the mid 1800s. The world was about to deal with the sin of slavery. Some did so via law alone. This nation killed hundreds of thousands in a war to settle this issue...and it still wasn’t settled as Jim Crow and segregation came roaring in to maintain the gaps. (officers not allowed to use the rest room, kids not allowed good books and schools, Woodrow Wilson)
12. In one of the very few books in the Bible written to an individual, the tiny Book of Philemon has Paul telling a man that the runaway slave he was seeking was now his brother. That was a radical kick to the social system of that day...and our day.
13. “And in his name all oppression will cease.” Do you realize how countercultural this still is? Politics has always used dictators we like to keep dictators we don’t like in check. Jesus wants all oppression to cease – not just the ones we like least. Christians can mistake making many laws with obeying Jesus. They aren’t the same thing. This isn’t the same thing as saying you can’t legislate morality. You can legislate against behavior which is dangerous to others but all forms of prohibition fail.

14. This is why our law is expressed in love. Our love is not express by creating more laws.
15. When we go to Jesus, we will be judged on how we loved each other (Matthew 25), not how we controlled them with laws.
16. Remember this when you look at someone and think of them as somehow not acceptable: When Jesus came to us, the world was in a very, very dark place; far darker than we are right now. Paul repeatedly tells the Romans in the Book of Romans that, when they were saved, they were sinners in a horrible state. Jesus does not wait to accept us until we are acceptable. His love makes us acceptable.
17. Remember that Proverbs 6 tells us that the first thing in a list of things God hates is “a haughty look.” Why? Because it would be hard to find something more ungodly than that. Dana Carvey’s church lady (back in the day) or angry, finger pointing ministers are not reflecting God and should thank God that He did not appear to us 2000 years ago in that way. He came as a child, the most nonthreatening way to approach us.
18. And so “let all within us praise His holy name. Christ is the Lord; O praise his name forever. His power and glory evermore proclaim.”