

Advent – Making Room for Love // Luke 2:1-20

Intro

Our Advent theme is called 'Making Room' and today we are going to talk about creating space in our lives for love.

A major theme of literature, movies, theatre, art and music is love.

We are made by love and for love. We all have an innate desire to love and be loved. Victor Hugo, writes: *“The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved; loved for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves.”*

What is this thing called love? I'd like to know what your definitions and descriptions of love are...

Because love is a multi-dimensional quality it cannot be limited to just one definition, a single, pithy statement. Love, like a diamond has many facets and it requires a multi-faceted response.

The ancient Greeks understood this and they had a number of words for love.

Eros = sexual desire or passion.

The Greeks had a tendency to view eros as a dangerous, fiery and an irrational form of love that could take hold of and possess you. They thought of eros as a base expression of love.

Yet the Bible holds erotic or romantic love in high regard.

The Song of Songs, is a beautiful piece in the Hebrew Bible, celebrating sexual love and describing the passionate love between a man and his betrothed.

The Song of Songs begins:

Kiss me and kiss me again,

for your love is sweeter than wine.

How pleasing is your fragrance;

your name is like the spreading fragrance of scented oils.

No wonder all the young women love you!

Take me with you; come, let's run!

The king has brought me into his bedroom.

The Song of Songs was classed as so erotic that it wasn't to be read until a man turned 30.

Philia = deep friendship.

Philia described the comradeship that developed between those who had fought side by side on the battlefield. It was about showing loyalty to your friends, sacrificing for them, as well as sharing your emotions with them. Philia tended to be limited to a small group of close, intimate people. The Greeks wouldn't be too impressed by Facebook and the 'friends' we gather there.

Storge = the love experienced between parents and their children.

Steve uses the illustration of his firstborn child. Parental love, as described by 'storge' also disciplines and corrects. Steve uses the illustration of his son hiding the wooden spoons under the bed.

Ludus = playful love.

Ludus refers to the affection between children; the flirting that takes place between young lovers; or describes a group of adults sitting around bantering and laughing

together. Dancing with strangers was also considered a form of ludus – a playful, teasing. An English word that captures the spirit of ludus is ‘frivolity’. Some of us need a little more ludus in our lives.

Pragma = long-standing, mature love.

Pragma describes the deep understanding that develops between long-married couples that have weathered storms and stayed together. Pragma is about making compromises to help the relationship work over time, and showing patience and tolerance.

The psychoanalyst Erich Fromm said that we expend too much energy on "falling in love" and need to learn more how to "stand in love." Pragma is about standing in love—making an effort to give love rather than just receive it.

Philautia = self-love.

The Greeks realized there were two types of self-love. One was an unhealthy variety associated with narcissism, where you became self-obsessed and focused on personal fame and fortune, whereas, a healthier version of philautia enhanced your capacity to love.

The idea was that if you like and feel secure in yourself, you will have plenty of love to give others. Aristotle said, *"All friendly feelings for others are an extension of a man's feelings for himself."*

Agape = selfless love.

Agape is the highest form of Greek love and describes a radical, selfless love that is extended to all people, whether family members or distant strangers. Agape is the impulse to empathise and extend care to others.

Agape was translated into Latin as *caritas*, which is the origin of our word "charity."

When the writers of the New Testament were looking for words to describe God's love and the kind of love Christian's are called to exhibit – 'agape' is the word they chose.

1 John 4:16 *'...God is agape...'*

Agape is the substance of who God is.

John 3:16 *'For God so agaped the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whosoever believes in him, will not perish but have everlasting life.'*

God's radical, self-giving love sits at the heart of the incarnation and the cross.

The greatest commandment in the Bible is a call to live a life of agape:

“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?”

Jesus replied, “‘You must agape the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.

A second is equally important: ‘Agape your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

Matthew 22:36-40

That which is to frame our lives is a radical, selfless love for God, others and also our selves.

Let's turn to our Bible reading from Luke 2, to see agape love in action.

Agape and the Shepherds

‘That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!’ And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.” **Luke 2:8-14**

The shepherds were a totally unexpected choice – they were selected as the first to hear the news of the Saviour’s birth and invited to come and take a look at God in flesh.

Middle eastern shepherds in ancient times were despised by the religious orthodox of the day. Because of their work, shepherds were unable to keep the ceremonial law and all the meticulous hand washing rituals that were required. The shepherds were also likely to be quite

young, and probably included a number of females. They were the common folk.

Yet, God extends agape to the shepherds. He esteems those that others look down upon. Agape sides with the weak, the unseen, the unwashed and the unwelcomed. And agape invites them to one of the most profound moments in human history – the incarnation – the coming of God to earth in human form.

When a child was born in ancient times, local musicians would congregate at the home where the baby was being delivered and they'd play simple music to welcome the child into the world. Because Mary & Joseph a far away from home, God arranges a heavenly choir to sing at the birth of his Son. And the shepherds get to witness this remarkable event.

Conclusion

Love can't be reduced to a narrow, single expression; it has many dimensions as the ancient Greeks well understood. We need a balance of love expressions in our lives but the highest and greatest form of love is agape.

This advent season create space in your life for love: for eros, for those of us who are fortunate enough to be in committed relationships where sexual passion is

permissible – love passionately; make space for philia – for those deep, intimate friendships you enjoy; create space for storge – tell your kids or your parents you love them; create space for ludus – enjoy some frivolity over Christmas; create space for pragma – strengthen the deep ties of mature love with your spouse or partner; don't forget in the busyness of the season to make room for your self – be kind to you; and most of all display radical, selfless love this Christmas by making room and welcoming the least in our society.

Resource: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/happiness/the-ancient-greeks-6-words-for-love-and-why-knowing-them-can-change-your-life>