

“Love Stronger Than Fear”

By the fourth Sunday of Advent,
we’re no longer standing at the edge of the story.

The waiting is almost over.

The wreath is nearly full of light.

And today, we name what has been holding all that waiting together.

Today, the candle we light is Love.

Not a soft or sentimental love.

Not love as decoration or nostalgia.

But love as Scripture understands it —

love that acts,

love that risks,

love that shows up when it would be easier to turn away.

The Bible is remarkably clear about this.

In the first letter of John, we hear it plainly:

“Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God.”

That is not a suggestion.

It is a declaration about the nature of God

and the calling of God’s people.

Micah reminds us that God’s love

enters the world from the edges, not the center.

From Bethlehem — small, overlooked Bethlehem —

comes the one who will shepherd the people and bring peace.

God's love does not announce itself through power or prestige.

It comes quietly, choosing what the world often overlooks.

The psalmist sings of that same love and calls it *steadfast*.

"I will sing of the Lord's faithful love forever," Psalm 89 says.

This is not love that wavers with circumstance.

Not love that depends on our worthiness.

This is covenant love — love that holds on, love that remembers,

love that keeps showing up

long after others would have walked away.

That is the love Advent invites us to trust.

John's letter pushes this even further.

"No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us."

In other words, God becomes visible through love.

Not through arguments.

Not through fear.

Not through force.

But through love that takes shape in human lives.

And John is careful to name something essential here:

the opposite of love is not hate.

The opposite of love is fear.

Fear closes us off.

Fear makes us defensive.

Fear convinces us to protect ourselves at the expense of others.

Fear tells us to stay quiet when love calls us to speak.

Fear tells us to look away when love asks us to see.

That is why John says, *"Perfect love drives out fear."*

Not because fear disappears overnight,

but because love is stronger.

Love steadies us.

Love gives us courage.

Love moves us toward one another instead of away.

Jesus understood this.

On the night before his arrest —

after kneeling and washing the disciples' feet —

Jesus didn't give his followers a list of beliefs or a survival plan.

Instead, he gave them love.

"I give you a new commandment: Love each other.

Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other.

This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples."

Not by fear.

Not by dominance.

Not by certainty.

But by love that looks like his.

Love that comforts the broken.

Love that has the courage to kneel.

Love that sees the overlooked and calls them beloved.

Love that tells the stories of Jesus not only with words,
but with lives shaped like his.

And here is where the power of love becomes unmistakable.

Love comforts.

It sits with grief.

It does not rush healing or demand cheerfulness.

It says, *"You are not alone."*

Love gives courage.

It gives people the strength to speak truth,

to forgive, to try again,

to stand beside someone who is hurting

even when the outcome is uncertain.

Love sees what others miss.

Bethlehem.

A basin and a towel.

A person the world has written off.

Love says, *"You matter."*

Love tells the story of Jesus

in a world that desperately needs it —

not as a theory,

but as a lived reality.

And love does something even greater than all of this.

Love conquers death.

John tells us,

"This is how God showed his love to us:

God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him."

Love does not deny suffering.

Love enters it.

Love does not avoid death.

Love passes through it – and breaks its power.

That is the promise we are moving toward at Christmas,

and beyond Christmas, all the way to Easter:

that love is stronger than fear,

stronger than all that pulls us away from love,

stronger than death itself.

And if that is really true –

if love is not just something we celebrate,

but something that changes everything –

then it can't stay at a distance.

Love has to move into real life, into real choices,

into the way we live and love right now.

So as the light of Christ draws near,

the question is no longer whether love has come,

but how that love is lived among us now.

It means we choose love when fear would be easier.

It means we comfort instead of withdraw.

It means we notice instead of overlook.

It means we tell the story of Jesus not only with our voices,
but with our hands, our choices, our courage.

It means we trust that even small acts of love —
staying in the room when things feel awkward,
choosing not to have the last word,
showing up without needing to be useful,
letting someone else set the pace,
and doing the next kind thing even when no one notices -
are the very ways God's love keeps taking flesh among us.

As Micah promised, the shepherd will stand and feed the flock,
and the people will live securely.

As the psalm sings, God's steadfast love endures forever.

As John insists, love is from God —
and wherever love is alive, God is there.

And as Jesus tells us,
this is how the world will know.

As we light the candle of Love today,
may that love take shape in us —
strong enough to stay with one another,
able to face fear without letting it have the final say,

attentive enough to notice who might otherwise be missed,
and faithful enough to keep showing up,
even when the way forward is hard to see.

That's when God's love shows its strength —
shining even in the face of death,
and refusing to let death have the final word.

And that love does not stop with Christ alone.
It takes root in ordinary lives —
in people who choose to stay, to care,
and to carry one another through what comes next.

Thanks be to God. Amen.