

## **Draw Near To Love**

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Isaiah 9:2-7

### **CHILDREN'S TIME**

Today we are talking about God's love and that is pretty big. So I thought maybe we can measure it. How can we do that? Well, I brought several things that we use to measuring things. Maybe they will help us measure God's love.

I was making waffles this past week and I used a measuring cup for the flour. I used two cups of flour for the waffles. I wonder if we could use a measuring cup to measure God's love? Psalm 23 says, "You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." If our cup runs over with God's love, maybe it isn't the best thing to measure God's love.

Last year, I was repairing a closet and needed to put some drywall in the back and sides, so I used a tape measure, like this one, to be sure that I cut the dry wall just the right length. We can use a tape measure to measure the length, width, and height of different things. I wonder if we could use a tape

measure for God's love? Psalm 108 says that God's love is higher than the sky. This tape measure goes up to 12 feet, and if God's love is higher than the sky, we don't have enough tape to measure all the way up to the sky, do we?

I use my watch sometimes to measure time when I am running races. I look at it when I start and then when I finish to see how long it took to run the whole race. Maybe some people here will use their watch to measure how long my sermon goes this morning. I wonder if we could use a watch to measure how long God's love will last. Psalm 103 says that God's love is from everlasting to everlasting. That means that it started before any of us were here and will last long after all of us are gone. Wow! We certainly can't use a watch to measure God's love.

In the Bible it also says that God loved us so much that God gave us the only son God had — that's Jesus. I can't even understand how big God's love would be to do that! How can you measure love like that? We can't measure it. Actually, we don't need to measure it. We only need to experience it.

## SERMON

Today we are focused on drawing near to love.

Let's start with reading a couple scriptures about love. Perhaps the most popular passage in all of the Bible is John 3:16. Listen to this passage in the spirit of Advent, as we wait for Jesus to be born.

### JOHN 3:16-17

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

In 1 John, we read about following in God's footsteps of love.

### 1 JOHN 4:7-12

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning*

*sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

We'll spend a bit more time now on a passage from the book of Isaiah. After hearing from John and 1 John, listen for where you find love in this passage.

### ISAIAH 9:2-7

Where do you find love in this passage?

This passage is a very common Old Testament passage used to foretell Jesus' coming — a prophecy about how God would come in the flesh to be with us and save us from oppression, slavery, sin, and anything that might hinder our full expression of life as God made us.

We read this passage and our first thought is Jesus — that the passage foretold of Jesus' birth and described who he was and what he was going to do.

What we forget is that what Isaiah wrote was relevant to the people of his day and time, 700 years before Jesus. In those days, Isaiah wrote

that the people were living in what he described as “thick darkness” where people “see only distress and darkness” and “the gloom of anguish.”

The reality for them was oppression by the Assyrians, who were the mighty superpower of the day. Nobody who understood regional politics would have said there was a chink in their power or would have been wise to hint they could soon fall from power.

So, the people lived in gloom under the boot of Assyria’s power.

Then Isaiah stepped on the stage to proclaim cause for joy, not in military battle and victory, but in the birth of a child who would come in love from God. This child held a promise of good things for the people. Love would be found in the one who was called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

These terms designate royalty, but more than royalty, it was royalty ordained by, fueled by, empowered by, and under the authority of the one true God who presides over all things, not by force, but through love.

It is likely that the immediate reference for Isaiah was great King Hezekiah, one of the more prominent kings of Israel who reigned for 29 years.

He was known to have purified and repaired the Temple, and worked hard to rid the whole kingdom of idols and their worship.

In Jesus’ day, there was a similar feeling of oppression, this time from the Romans, the ruling superpower of that day. They found solace and hope in the words of Isaiah that a child would be born who would provide for them salvation from their current predicament. through love.

So, what God did for the people of Isaiah’s day, God was doing again for the people of Jesus’ day.

### **The Squirrel Problem**

A small town was having a massive squirrel problem and each local church was trying to find a solution.

The Presbyterian church called a meeting to decide what to do about their squirrel infestation. After much prayer and consideration, they concluded that the squirrels were predestined to be there, and they shouldn’t interfere with God’s divine will.

At the Baptist church the squirrels had taken an interest in the baptistery. The deacons met and decided to put a water-slide on the baptistery and let the squirrels drown themselves. The squirrels liked the slide and unfortunately, knew instinctively how to swim, so twice as many squirrels showed up the following week.

The Lutheran church decided that they were not in a position to harm any of God's creatures. So, they humanely trapped their squirrels and set them free near the Baptist church. Two weeks later the squirrels were back when the Baptists took down the water-slide.

But the Catholic church came up with a very creative solution! They baptized all the squirrels and made them members of the church. Now they only see them at Christmas and Easter.

Not much was heard from the Jewish synagogue. They took the first squirrel and circumcised him and haven't seen a squirrel since.

While different denominations and "flavors" of Christians have different doctrine about squirrels and many other things, they all agree that God's love is central to the faith.

This is the unchanging character and nature of God!

The Ancient prophets understood that God worked in rhythms and cycles while holding to a true and consistent nature. The people paid a lot of attention to the stories from their past, and drew strength from the notion that God would work again, and again, and again in love. They needed the reminder that God's nature was love.

Prophets, like Isaiah spoke messages from God that illuminated the mind, the work, and the character of God.

They opened up windows to see the ancient and current work of God more clearly.

This is helpful for us. Because once we understand God's character of love, we can see God more clearly around us in our lives and in the world today and draw close to that love.

God loved the people in Isaiah's time. God loved the people in the time of Jesus. And God will continue to love us today.

God is drawing near to you. Now, it's your turn to draw near to the ancient and current God of love.

## **draw near to love**

By Sarah Are

I know love's real, for I have felt it in my bones the way cold air finds my lungs and music finds my memories — certainly and entirely.

And I know winter is real,  
for I have worn grief like a blanket — A blanket of what once was, covering my bony elbows and forgotten smile lines.

Somewhere in between those certain realities,  
I find myself wishing on shooting stars  
and wondering if they were the same ones that Jesus slept under.  
I find myself whistling,  
“O come, O come, Emmanuel,”  
followed shortly by, “All is calm, all is bright.”

It's the melodic rotation I live in —  
Joy and doubt.  
Light and night.  
Love and grief.  
You alone and you with me.  
So I'll never stop waiting for Christmas.  
Every day I'll rise with the sun  
and pray that today it will be Christmas again, that today will be a day when you are here, when you are near me,  
when the blanket is ripped away to reveal the light and my smile lines have reason to bow again.

Then the stars fall, the sun rises,  
and in my heart of hearts, I know it is.  
For ever since that day so many moons ago,  
nothing has been able to separate us from your love.

And so I say — I know love's real,  
for I have felt it in my bones. All is calm. All is bright.