

**“Love All”**

*The Advent Conspiracy, part 4*

1 John 4:7-21

[44] *(Advent Conspiracy “Love All” video.)*

[45] Five days until Christmas Eve. Is anybody here tingling, yet? Are you feeling the excitement? Or dreading all the chores to be done? Myself, I am psyched. I hope you are inviting your friends and neighbors to come on Friday night at 7:30. With all the music and candles, Christmas Eve promises to be a wonderful, holy experience. I have a good feeling about this season, and I feel like God is ready to do something incredible among us.

Even if you are feeling overwhelmed right now, I have a reminder for you: you are not alone. Look around you. We are the Church, with a capital C, and we cannot be the Church alone. We need each other. We all need Christ in our lives, so we can feel God’s love. That’s what today is all about. Love. Let’s take a moment to pray and thank God for his love.

Holy, mighty, powerful God, we come before you this morning needing a reminder of how much you love us. Thank you for your Son Jesus, for the true meaning of Christmas and his sacrifice. Let your Holy Spirit fall upon us this morning, that we may give you thanks and praise your name. Amen.

[46] As I begin, I have some questions for you. Help a pastor out. I’m looking for some feedback. First, what are some of your pet peeves? What “gets your goat”? What do you hate? Go ahead, let loose, but remember, this is a “family show.” *(Allow time for answers.)*

Don’t judge me, but personally, I hate cats, because they make me sneeze. I also hate no snow on Christmas, term papers, and empty TP rolls.

Isn’t this great? This is like therapy. I’m not surprised at anything we listed. We are human, after all. As I’ve said before, we are not perfect. We do not live in a perfect world. We all need grace.

[47] So let’s flip the question. What do you love? *(Allow time for answers.)*

I love my Northwestern Wildcats. I love a cup of hot cocoa when it’s cold outside. I love my family.

It’s interesting what a wide range of answers we have. We might say, “I love pizza,” and then, “I love Jesus.” I might not love cats, but I detest slavery and

injustice. They are all legitimate answers, but the level of feeling varies widely. I would never want to rid the world of cats....probably....but I would love to rid the world of slavery.

[48] The last three weeks, we have learned three core practices of the Advent Conspiracy: Worship Fully, Spend Less, and Give More. Everything we have been talking about the last three Sundays leads up to the topic today: Love All.

The true meaning of Christmas is God’s love.

I think you would agree with me that Loving All is a good, solid purpose to have in life. But what do we really mean when we say that? What is love? (*Sing “Don’t hurt me, no more...”*) Catchy song lyrics, but not the answer I’m looking for.

[49] As our first question revealed, there is more than one definition of love. Did you know there are three common Greek words for love: Philio, Eros, and Agape (ah-GOP-ay)? Examining these three words can show us what it truly means to love all. Let’s break them down, starting with philio. Does that sound familiar?

It sounds like Philadelphia, “The city of brotherly love.” Philio is the love that you have for a family member or a close friend. It’s a sort of protective, obligatory love. Anyone have brothers or sisters? Are they hard to love sometimes? Of course! I have two brothers. And I love them, but sometimes, I can’t stand them. That’s philio.

Another word for love is eros. (Is it just me, or is it getting warmer in here?) Eros is the sensual kind of love. The kind of love between a husband and wife. The “falling in love” kind of love. It’s strange to me, that even though God created eros, we avoid talking about it in the church. God created eros, and God called it good. Check out Genesis 1. God placed boundaries on eros, and if we stay within them, it is good. And if we cross those boundaries, in our brokenness, we need to ask God to heal us.

Philio and eros are two types of love, but my favorite is agape. Agape is unconditional, self-giving, self-sacrificing love. The love shown by the father who accepts his runaway son when he returns. (Luke 15). The love that causes us to pour out our hearts and our wallets to victims of disasters. The apostle John tells

us, agape comes straight from God, because God is love. Agape is the love the Christmas story reveals.

[50] When we say we are going to “Love All,” we are saying, we will “agape” all. So here’s the million-dollar question: Why? Why should we love all?

The obvious answer to me is: because it’s the right thing to do. And the apostle John gives us several other good reasons in I John 4. Verse 7: “Love comes from God.” Verse 16: “God is love.” Verse 19: “God first loved us.” Jesus Christ is agape personified, love straight from heaven. Not I-love-you-because-I-have-to philio, nor mushy-gushy eros. Agape, the love of Christ, is self-giving love.

True love is prophetic. True love is unexpected. It is awe inspiring. It completes us.

[51] It’s pretty easy to only love those who love us in return. Jesus said so himself in Matthew 5:46: everyone, even the “tax collectors,” love those who love them back. The part of the world who doesn’t love Jesus, they still love their friends. But Jesus said, true love is loving those who don’t love you back.

Agape love is not so much a feeling as it is a conscious choice. John emphasizes this in verse 19: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother (or sister), they are a liar.” And FYI, if you didn’t know, lying is bad, OK? Don’t be a liar.

Now, I know we said there are things we hate. We may feel strong temporary, reactional anger sometimes. But intentionally choosing to hate people is different. John says, if God’s perfect love is in us, we are compelled to love all. We don’t get to pick and choose. We cannot continue to hate anyone and love God at the same time. It is impossible. When we truly love all, when we choose to forgive and let go, and let love heal us, it is a sign of who we belong to. That’s a radical, agape type of love. And frankly, it doesn’t make any worldly sense. It’s not supposed to. It’s literally love that is out of this world.

[52] At Christmas, we are especially reminded that Jesus loved the outcasts. The traitor tax collectors, the Romans, the prostitutes. The lepers. The untouchables. The forgotten. Today the world is watching us, the Church, and asking, “Do I see the same love in Christians they say Jesus has for all?”

If you know John 3:16, say it with me. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him would not perish but

have everlasting life.” The Bible says, God loves the world. Everyone. When we take a moment to love all through spending less and giving more, we are loving Jesus. We are worshipping fully.

Each one of us needs to ask, who are the outcast in my life? Who “lives across the tracks”? Whom has the world overlooked? The people in countries with no water? The homeless? Who else? Are we loving them, or by ignoring them, are we hating them?

[53] Jesus takes our loving and giving very personally. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus says, “Whatever you did to the least of these, you did it to me.” (NRSV) Would you refuse Jesus if he personally asked you for help? Of course not. The Bible says, Jesus is asking us all, right now.

Jesus does not sit back and say, “Now, go and love these people for me while I sit in heaven and watch how you do.” Jesus does not keep score on some heavenly clipboard. Jesus is among us. Jesus has showed us what love is. I John 4:9 reminds us, “This is how God showed his love among us: God sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him.”

[54] Have you ever thought about what Jesus gave up to come to earth? All the delights of heaven? The eternal presence of God the Father? There is nothing we could ever sacrifice in our own lives that could even come close to comparing! Ephesians 3:8 says we have the unfathomable riches of Christ available to us. All because of his sacrifice.

You have to make an active choice to worship fully, spend less, give more and love all. It doesn’t happen by accident. Jesus wasn’t sent into the world by mistake. Jesus was God’s plan from the beginning. So we can make the choice to love all. The apostle John says you can’t say you love God and hate your brother. I submit to you that when we neglect the poor, we are practicing a form of hate.

I know those are strong words, but I believe them. We are supposed to be people who love with our actions. If Christmas is about love, why give ourselves gifts that don’t matter? Can you tell me what you got for Christmas four years ago? I have no idea! But if you ask me, where have I served on mission trips, I can tell you without hesitating: Mexico, Kentucky, St. Croix, Tennessee, the U.P, and Roscommon County. What was in my stocking last year? No idea. But what

is the name of the child I sponsor in Ecuador? Emiler. And I love writing letters back and forth to him.

Instead of just talking about eternal life, we should remember that we are charged to love people in this life. Instead of treating the Bible like a history book, we should see it as an invitation to join the story, today.

[55] Loving all means changing our habits. It's not a one-time shot. The Advent Conspiracy is about a lifestyle change. It's about a 12-month a year practice of loving all. But the deal is, God came for the whole world, not just us. We can't just tell someone about God's love; we have to live our lives with the same attitude of Jesus. An attitude of servanthood. An attitude of risk.

It is infinitely more satisfying to give relationally. It is infinitely more satisfying to say, instead of buying useless presents, I gave the gift of life, through clean water, through farm animals, through blankets, to someone who really needed them.

Jesus is asking, who are the least of these in your life? In your world? In our world? Will you buy them a present in Jesus' name? Will you love all?

There is still time. If you haven't got Jesus a birthday present yet, you still have 6 days left. Let's pray.

*Ideas for giving Jesus a birthday present.*

- Living Water International ([water.cc/advent](http://water.cc/advent))
- Heifer International ([www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org))
- World Vision ([www.worldvision.org](http://www.worldvision.org))
- Compassion International ([www.compassion.com](http://www.compassion.com))
- United Methodist Committee on Relief ([umcmission.org](http://umcmission.org))

Memory verse

1 John 4:19 - "We love because God first loved us."

Reflection questions

1. Who are the easiest people in your life to love? The most difficult?
2. What people in your life have told you about the love of God?
3. What words would you use to describe the love of God?
4. Why is Christmas a good time to reflect on whether or not we are showing love in our actions?

5. In last three weeks, we have been challenged to Worship Fully, Spend Less, and Give More. How are each of these actions related to Loving All?
6. How does “perfect love cast out all fear”? (1 John 4:18) What is the source of perfect love? Who in your life needs to hear about that love?

More information and ideas are available at [www.adventconspiracy.org](http://www.adventconspiracy.org)