

WAITING WITH LOVE
Rev. Bruce J. Roffey
King City United Church
York United Ministries
Sunday, November 28, 2021

Pearls are wonderful, aren't they? A single strand of matched pearls is such a classic look. I'm not talking about inexpensive, imitation pearls, plastic ones, but real pearls. Real pearls are like dewdrops of joyful angel tears. They shine with the luster of the rainbow. They are something to be cherished and valued. They are a precious gift. You want to protect them, to preserve them, to treasure them as heirlooms. How do you take care of pearls?

I was talking some time ago to a jeweler friend about pearls and he showed me a set. The odd one had the beautiful luster you expect. Others were much less brilliant. Others distinctly dull, a few misshapen. This was once a fine set of pearls, beautiful in themselves and together enhancing the beauty of the wearer. But they weren't properly cared for. How so? They were put in a plastic bag inside a box inside a bank safety deposit box. These were valuable, precious after all and they needed to be safeguarded, protected, but this was not the right way. When they came out this is what they looked like. Their light was limpid. They had lost their fire, their richness, their life, and they were worth nothing.

Pearls are not meant to be stored away. In the dark without

air and moisture they die. And worst of all, they cannot be restored again.

Pearls are meant to be handled, to be worn, exhibited before the world, touched. They need the light of day, not the darkness of anxiety. They need the moisture of freedom, not the aridness of safety. They need the risk of handling, not the fear of failure.

You have pearls. Each one of you has a set of magnificent, matched pearls, pearls given to you as a gift, valuable, precious pearls. The pearls of faith and hope and peace and love. Faith – the foundation of your life. Hope for the future. Peace beyond understanding in the present. And love – the substance of your living, the source and goal of your life. How will you honour those gifts? How will you preserve them? How will you care for them?

Advent speaks about the gifts of God in the coming of Christ. It reminds us of the first coming at Christmas, the historical event. It promises us the Second Coming, the eschatological event we call it in theology. And it alerts us to the present coming, the existential event, Christ coming into the present moment, into our lives. It reminds us that we live between times, between advents, and that this is a time of anticipation, a time of waiting with expectation and with hope. And it asks us how will you live in this time? How will you wait? How will you wait especially knowing that Christ waits with you? How will you use the gifts, the pearls, the gifts of God in Christ?

Will you store them away falsely protecting them, or will you bring them out for all to see? How will you wait?

Wait with love. Let the love of Christ be the motivation, goal and source of your living. Wait with love.

Wait, first of all, with the love that Christ has for you, the love that Christ has for you *now*, the pearl of love that Christ gives you *now*. Have faith in that love.

During this season of Advent, the candle lighting liturgy we will be using focuses on the readings from the Hebrew prophets that are assigned for these days. Today's was from Jeremiah.ⁱ

In Jeremiah's time, there was great uncertainty. Assyria, the dominant superpower, had been defeated by the rising power of the Babylonian empire. The kingdom of Judah vacillated between seeking a powerful ally or standing alone.

Religiously and theologically, the people felt that they would always be secure because of the covenant with God. God had promised that David's descendants would reign and God had made the Temple in Jerusalem God's home. How could this fail?

But Jeremiah believed that this was false security. God's covenant rested in the people's willingness to live faithfully, not in their loyalty to king or Temple, to a person or a building. Even if Jerusalem was sacked and the Temple destroyed, this is not the end because God will always continue to work within the life of the people to bring about good.ⁱⁱ

Our faith is not grounded in places and individuals; it is grounded in God alone. It is grounded in Christ and in his great love for us, a love that will not let us down, a love that became flesh at the first Christmas, a love that will come again in perfect fulfillment, a love that is present now, a love we can feel in our hearts, and cherish.

The church in Thessalonica to which Paul wrote was in a time of waiting. They awaited the second coming, which they expected imminently, soon. Paul wrote to encourage them, to upbuild them, to confirm their faithfulness and to urge them to continue to be a distinctive and open community where love reigns, love, the pearl from Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ

And so he prays for them. He prays that the Master might make them increase and abound in love, a love that fills their lives.^{iv}

Have faith in Christ's love. Wait with love.

Then use that love. Bring love into the open. Handle it. Exhibit it. Show it in your actions, your behaviour, your words. Love each other. Wait with the love you have for each other. "Abound in love to one another," Paul wrote.

I love the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases it, "May the Master pour on the love so it fills your lives and splashes over on everyone around you, just as it does from us to you."^v

There are many images for the church such as body, colony

of heaven, people of God... The one that I have always been fond of is family. The church as family, close knit, a unit, sisters and brothers bearing each other's burdens, sharing each other's joys.

In the theory of church dynamics, there is even a kind of church called a family church. In that kind of church, everyone knows everyone and the minister is the chaplain.

A family church has less than 50 adults at worship. We are a family church, not because of numbers, but because of love. Here we try to know everyone, and to a great extent we do. Here we extend our love to each other. Here the love splashes out on others.

This, though, has been difficult for the past two years of pandemic, when we have largely been physically absent from each other. Nonetheless, I commend you on keeping in touch with others, looking out for them, for caring and compassion. Perhaps our efforts have weakened with pandemic fatigue, and perhaps some have felt left out. Still I commend you and encourage you to redouble your efforts until that time comes when we can gather together more freely and feel God's love incarnated in each other.

So wait with love. Wait with your love for those around you. And find the pearl of peace that comes from loving others.

And lastly, love all people of the world. In the Revised Standard Version, Paul says something that is lost Peterson's

paraphrase, “abound in love to one another *and to all people.*”

Wait with love for all people. Be a source of hope for others in the love you share.

In a *Peanuts* cartoon, you see the dog Snoopy up on the roof of his doghouse. It’s snowing and everything including him is covered with snow. He’s holding his empty dish, empty except for snow.

Lucy comes out happy in the festive spirit. “Go in peace, be warmed and filled!” And then she turns and goes back into the house and slams the door. In the last frame, you see a confused Snoopy looking toward the house, shivering and hungry and utterly baffled.^{vi} Christians and the Christian church must do better than Lucy. It isn’t sufficient to preach love without doing love. We need not just the words of love but the work of love.

Many years ago, a wise mentor of mine advised that one of the ways to evaluate a congregation that you are considering serving is to look at their offerings to Mission and Service. A church that does more than talk, a church that looks outward for ways to help others is a healthy church. There are, of course, other ways to help others than the M&S Fund. This congregation in the past has worked with other churches to sponsor refugees. The Sunday School and now the congregation itself sponsors a child overseas. Before Covid hit, we participated in the Fill a Purse for a Sister Campaign, and we brought food regularly to the

church for the Food Bank. It was more difficult when we were no longer physically meeting, but we need once again to ask ourselves, both personally and congregationally, what can we do to help others and to spread God's love? How can we wait with love for others? So now that we are meeting again we are asking folk to once again bring food for the Food Bank as part of our Advent and Christmas philanthropy.

During this season of Advent and on into the Christian year, wait with love. Be a source of hope for others in the love you share. Find peace in the love you bear for each other. Have faith in the love that Christ has for you. Faith, hope, peace, love – gifts from God through Christ, precious pearls. Bring them out into the open, use them and they will shine brightly for the entire world to see.

So may it be for you and me. So may it be. Amen.

ⁱ Jeremiah 33: 14-16.

ⁱⁱ From the clergy notes in the *Whole People of God* curriculum.

ⁱⁱⁱ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Interpretation Series, John Knox Press, 1998), pp. 5-7.

^{iv} Reading for today was 1 Thessalonians 2: 17 – 3: 13.

^v Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message – The New Testament in Contemporary Language* (Navpress, 1993).

^{vi} "An Advent Attitude," *Homiletics* (Communication Resources Inc., 1999).