



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

December 24, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

Candlelight Worship

Reading: [1 John 4:9-14](#)

Reading: [Luke 2:1-7](#)

Reading: [Luke 2:8-20](#)

The Gift of God

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

It's the Christmas season and one of the favorite things that people like to do is watch Christmas movies. I was doing some work today and was listening to a podcast where they were ranking Christmas movies. What are some of your favorites? Elf, maybe even one that came up on their list, Jingle All the Way, The Santa Clause; you can go back to some of the classics like It's a Wonderful Life or Miracle on 34th Street. You can go to what we call classics now, like the original Grinch or A Christmas Carol, with the Muppets, of course. We like that one. Some people's favorites might be Christmas Vacation. Some people say it's the best. Or Home Alone, that one my life loves and I said "We didn't get to watch that one. The kids didn't treat each other very nicely."

The one that they really debated in the podcast I was watching was Love Actually. Do you guys know that one at all? The debate was even if it's a Christmas movie. It happens during Christmas, but it really talks about the love life of about nine different couples who are all kind of connected through family or friends. It takes place during the holidays. What was interesting to me was how the girl on the podcast really liked the movie, but her husband didn't. One of the things he said was it didn't have good family morals. A lot of things it has are like this person cheating on this person and not a lot of good ways of showing relationships. I thought a little bit more about that as I thought about the text that we read today when it talks about the love of God. The title of that movie is Love Actually. You see all these stories in that movie and there is a lot of betrayal and not good relationships. There are people cheating on this person, that person is cheating on that person; is that love actually? What I would say is the love that we need is really the love that God gives us, as found in 1 John.

When we look at our world, we do see a lot of love actually that is pretty bad. There are relationships that are broken, betrayal, and heartbreak, people that have done things to you that is so hard to forgive or things that you've done to others that you're just hoping someone will forgive you for. Love actually? That's our love. It's hard to find good love in our world. The divorce rates are sky rocketing and you see marriage is hard. Friendships are hard. Loving one another is so difficult.

So today we see love actually, how God loves us. One of the important things is that this is all really emphasizing what love really is. I think at the heart of it is Verse 10 where it says: ***This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*** This is love.

The problem is so often we like to make it all about us and our love. The world, by default, thinks we can earn our way to heaven and that's it all about how good we are. Maybe that's too simple because you don't say "I can get up to heaven by what I do" or "I can please God by what I do," but you can say this: "Well, at least I don't do that. At least I'm not like those people. At least I'm not like that other political side of the alley," whichever side you're on. So even if you're not saying that you can get up to heaven, we really like to compare ourselves and lift ourselves up to say "At least I love better than them" or "They don't even know how to love, so God is smiling on me because I'm not too bad." That's our love. But what love we need is the love that God gives us.

Another important part to look at is when we talk about our love or our faith, how important it is that we don't emphasize it's all about us and our love and our faith but it's all about God.

I teach this in our membership class to our 7th-8th graders. I talk about the difference between the "action" of faith and the "object" of faith. They say "What are you talking about?" The action of your faith is how strong of a faith you have, how much you love God. Do we need to have a really strong love for God to be saved? We want that and that's really important. When you look at people in movies; the Disney movies, the mantra often is "You just got to believe. Just have faith." If you listen to Aaron Rodgers at all, he says "If you believe it hard enough, you can make it come into existence." Just believe. So the action is so important.

But what I do so often with my students then is say "Is the action of faith or the object of my faith the most important?" I can take this water bottle and I can have such a strong faith in this. I can put this down. I could sacrifice to it. I could pray to it every day. I could have a really strong faith in this. But what good can this do? What power does this have to save me? It gives me some water, but then it gets empty. But what true power does it have? It has no power for my eternal soul. So the question is: is it so much about my love and my faith or what I believe in? That's where we get to the heart of who God is.

God says He shows His love for us by sending His only Son that we might live through Him. It's not about our love for Him but that He loved us and sent His Son as the atoning sacrifice. We testify that He has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. People can have a really strong faith, be fervent in all sorts of other religions. They can have self-meditation and be so committed to all sorts of things, but do they have a Savior? Can their faith system save them? You can't earn your way.

And then how amazing God's love for us is as we look at God giving Himself in the most unlikely place, as we just sang about in Where Shepherds Lately Knelt; it says **in that unlikely place I find him as they said**. When we read Luke, it's kind of bizarre that you hear these angels speak to the shepherds and it says, **"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."** They had been waiting hundreds of years! The Israelites had been waiting so long! You can go back (as our kids did today in the service) to the Garden of Eden as they were waiting for the Messiah. The angels announce that **"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born..."** And the next line: **"This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."** Could you imagine being one of the shepherds and hearing, first of all, seeing the angels—that's pretty amazing—and then the angels come and say "Hey, this thing you've been waiting for, the Savior of the world, the Messiah, He is born. Do you know where you're going to find Him? He will be in a feed trough with a bunch of animals." Wow!

What that means for us is how humble our Savior is. He came in the most unlikely place to save the most unlikely of people, you and me, the whole world—sinners who don't deserve it. He came to be the most humble, to serve and be in every one of our places so that we could have salvation. He walked in our shoes. He suffered humiliation. He felt the love of this world by being rejected, by family, by His own disciples, by the government, by the religious leaders, by everyone. He felt the lack of love of this world. He then gave Himself. The most unlikely of places and the most unlikely way of salvation by sacrificing Himself and going to the cross and suffering a horrible death, for you and for me. This is love. And this is a faith that does something. The object, the thing that we believe in, has loved us so much!

This Christmas as you think about all the things you do and all the events you go to—our kids were opening presents tonight and the joy and the fun—think about that baby born in the most unlikely of places, that He is there for you, that He lived His life for you, that God loves you so much. This is love. As you think about the gifts, as you think about the movies, enjoy them, but cherish the love that God gives you. Cherish what God has done for you so that we know the object of our faith, Jesus, is the Savior of the world. Because of that, we can go out and love one another, not to earn anything but just to share that love so that others can taste that love as well and to know that they are forgiven and there is a God who loves them and one who died for every one of their

sins. That one sin is not too big. This is love. This is actual love that our God has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.