

What's most important
Luke 1:1-20

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“Whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world, I think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow airport. General opinion makes out that we live in a world of hatred and greed but I don't see that. It seems to me that love is everywhere. Often it's not particularly dignified or newsworthy. but it's always there. Fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, old friends. When the planes hit the Twin Towers, as far as I know none of the phone calls from the people on board were messages of hate or revenge, they were all messages of love. If you look for it, I've got a sneaky feeling you'll find that love actually is .. all around.”

These words begin one of my favorite Christmas movies – “Love Actually” --one of my must sees for the season. I've used these words in my Christmas Eve service before, but I thought if there is ever a year when we are gloomy with the state of the world, this is it.

At the beginning of the movie while you hear these words, there are scenes of people from all over the world greeting each other at London's Heathrow's airport. Young couples in tight embraces, children running into the arms of their parents, teenagers with backpacks greeting their parents after being away, and a toddler giving his dad a kiss. For some, it looks like they haven't seen each other in quite awhile. These are not movie star type people but are pretty ordinary looking people of all colors sizes and shapes representing the wonderful diversity of the human race greeting one another.

This scene reminds me what is really important in life – not how much money we have or who we know or how well we are doing at work. What really matters is our connection with one another – our love for one another. It is interesting to note that Love Actually is a post 9-11 movie made in 2003 as you heard referenced in the opening words. Often, when a society goes through such a traumatic even, we are attentive to remembering what is important.

As I was watching another of my must-sees for the season, 'It's a wonderful life', I was reminded of the same theme.

This too is a post – something movie. It was released in 1946 after world war II and there too you hear the references to what has happened. The war is part of the story, including the main character George's brother, Harry being awarded the medal of honor for his service. The line that really gets me is near the end when Harry makes it home through a snowstorm and makes a toast to his brother George who has just been saved from going to jail for embezzlement of money because the whole town has come to his house and given money to cover what was missing. In his toast, Harry says – To my brother George, the richest man in town. George was anything but rich when it came to what he had physically. He lived in a broken down house, worked for very little at what we would call a non-profit these days. He had never travelled as he had longed to. But George had loved and served the people of Bedford Falls and those connections he had truly made him the richest man in town.

You might say – well Rev. Anne-Marie – That’s all very nice, but when are you going to talk about Jesus? I put to you that this is the message of Jesus – to be connected to one another, to serve one another and to love one another.

For love is incredibly powerful. And yes this is something many people try to live in their lives especially as Christmas time and don’t usually mention God. I believe that when we bring God in, we shore up our ability to love so that its not just a whim or happens when we feel like it. When we are intentional about loving God and loving others, that love flows especially in the worst of times. We love when its hard, when its challenging and when everything is crashing down around us.

I’m sure there will be post-pandemic movies where we will be reminded of the power of our love and how it got us through this time. For now, as we are in the midst of this pandemic, let us look right now for how our love for one another is holding us up. Love is not blocked when we can’t gather with our usual group for our Christmas dinner. Our connection to one another doesn’t go away if we can’t open presents together in the same room. Our worship can still happen even if we are not in the same building just as we are doing right now.

I know we are missing so many of our traditions, but my friends the love is still there. We are still connected in God’s love. A great example of this I think will be experienced in one of our St. Peter’s traditions which is to sing Silent Night together in a candle lit church. Tonight, we will sing Silent Night. We will light a candle whether it be one of the St. Peter’s 2020 Silent Night candles or any other candle. You will still be a part of it even if you don’t light a candle.

Our bulletins always says – the lights will be dimmed, you are invited to kneel as you are able and meditate on the magnificence of the birth of the Lord. And indeed, even though we are not physically together, we will meditate on the magnificence of the birth of the Lord. Another gift is that we now include those who have not been able to participate in this because they moved or were not physically able to come to church. How amazing is that!

My friends this is a very different Christmas than what we would have wanted. What remains is that we are still connected in God’s love and our love for one another. Bear that love into this world for that is what sustains us each and every day. For us Christians, bearing God’s love actually is possible with the birth of the Christ child into our hearts.