|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| John 3:14-211 John 4: 8-10 | Advent – Light of LOVE | Pinelands – 9am – 24/12/2023Thornton – 10:30am – 24/12/2023 |

We all love Stories… here is a short love story about a…

 **Welsh actor RICHARD BURTON…**

 *(Parables for Preachers: Vol. 6 # 10.94)*

**Burton's first wife was Sybil** and on one particular birthday she woke up to discover a red ribbon tied around her wrist and leading out of the bedroom down the passage way and into the house. With much excitement, she followed the ribbon wherever it led - though the lounge and dining room, into the kitchen, out the back door, down into the garden and finally along the driveway leading under the garage door. When she stooped down to open the garage door and follow the ribbon, she found that the other end of it was tied into an enormous bow around **a MGB GT sports car** - his birthday gift to her.

**One of Burton's friends,** on hearing the story, was so enthralled with his

romanticism and the creativity of his gift giving, that he retold the whole

story to his wife.

You can imagine then **his own surprise** on his birthday when he awoke to discover that his wife had now tied a ribbon around his wrist while he was asleep. It too led out of the bedroom and into the passageway. As Burton's friend began to follow the ribbon, his excitement began to mount, believing and yet not believing that his wife could possibly have done the same thing that Burton had done for his wife.

Nevertheless, the ribbon continued to unravel through their home, out into the garden and down the driveway and under the garage door. With an enormous sense of anticipation and a giggle he threw back the garage door and there, sure enough, was a car surrounded by the other end of the ribbon in a big bow.

**The only difference was: it was a dinky toy of his dream car.**

**The message read:**

***Do you think I love you any less because I can't afford***

***to give you the same as your friend got from his spouse!***

**God loves us all…**

 And he has given us all the same gift… **HIS SON - JESUS**

And that is ANOTHER LOVE STORY.

**Jesus is called… *The Light of the World*** *(John’s Gospel)*

We light the **Peace Candle** symbolising the Light of Christ in our midst.

We light the **ADVENT CANDLES**… all giving ***off LIGHT***

 Today we lit the **CANDLE of LOVE.**

When we think back to the **Christmas Story…**

There was **a lot of love** around the manger on that night so long ago.

We can’t look at a manger scene without thinking of…

**Mary’s love for her child.**

There is nothing like a mother’s love,

even if you are the mother of God.

**REMEMBER** the words of that song… ***“Mary Did You Know?”***

It paints a vivid picture of the relationship between…

Mary and the baby Jesus… with words like…

 Mary did you know that your baby boy is…

**Lord of all creation?**

 Mary did you know that your baby boy would…

one day **rule the nations?**

Mary did you know that your baby boy is…

**heaven's perfect Lamb?**

 Mary did you know this sleeping child you're holding is…

**the great I am!!**

**In a sense…** **Mary did know…**

 But that is **NOT** the ***LOVE…***

Represented by the **CANDLE OF LOVE.**

We can’t look at a manger scene without thinking of…

**Joseph’s love for MARY.**

I am sure there were **still doubts** in Joseph’s mind about

 *How Mary got pregnant…*

 Yes there was the **Angels** message to him… *BUT STILL?*

 Yes there were **Shepherds** visiting… *BUT STILL?*

 Yes there were **Magi** with gifts… *BUT STILL?*

**BUT…** Joseph loves **MARY…**

 And so comes realise who Jesus is

And so comes to Love Jesus as his own.

**BUT…** Neither is that the **LOVE**

Represented by the **CANDLE OF LOVE.**

The **LOVE** represented by the **CANDLE OF LOVE** goes way back…

 To… The beginning of… Genesis, Creation,

 The Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve.

**God Created…** Day and Night

 Land and See – Planets and Stars

 Tress, Plants and Animals

**God Created HUMANS…** Adam and Eve…

 To be in **Fellowship** with HIMSELF

 To be in **Relationship** with HIMSELF

 ***TO LOVE.***

We all know how that turned out… ***Don’t we?***

The whole Biblical Narrative is the Story of…

 **GOD…** REACHING OUT TO US

 Wanting to be in relationship with us.

 **GOD… LOVING US…** And wanting us to…

***LOVE HIM BACK***

The CHURCH has **not done** the best job communicating the Gospel.

We’ve made **God…** Sound like one…

Whose wrath needed to be pacified,

Who must be persuaded to forgive.

We’ve painted a **picture of God as…** Angry and Unforgiving,

 Judging and Punishing

As **Jesus** speaks to **Nicodemus** in the passage, we read earlier…

**Jesus reminds Nicodemus**, and us,

That it is **God** who continues to reach out to us…

**God** sent His Son into the world.

**God** gave us this wonderful gift at Christmas,

and it was all because of His love.

That is the **LOVE** represented by…

the **LIGHT** of the **CANDLE OF LOVE.**

It is the **LOVE of GOD…**

That God brought **LOVE** to…

a wayward, foolish, blundering,

sin-sick world.

That is the **LOVE** represented by

the **LIGHT** of the **CANDLE OF LOVE.**

That’s the **LOVE…** **in the manger.**

That’s the **LOVE…** lived out in the **Birth, Life and Death…**

of Jesus Christ.

**Jesus** came… To put **SKIN** on **LOVE,**

To show us the depth of God’s love.

The **LOVE** symbolized by this **CANDLE OF LOVE…**

Is ***SACRIFICIAL AND SACRAMENTAL.***

**John** also tells the of the time when **Jesus** told his disciples…

***“My commandment is this: love one another,***

***just as I love you.***

 ***The greatest love you can have for your friends***

***is to give your life for them.” (John 15:12-13)***

**Ernest Gordon** tells the story in his book Miracle on the River Kwai of

the Scottish soldiers during World War II, forced by their Japanese captors to labour on a jungle railroad.

One afternoon a **shovel was missing.**

The Japanese officer in charge became enraged, and demanded that the missing shovel be produced, or else. When nobody budged, the officer got his gun and threatened to kill them all on the spot.

It was obvious the officer meant what he had said.

Then, finally, one man stepped forward. The officer put away his gun, picked up a shovel, and beat the man to death.

When it was over, the survivors picked up the bloody corpse and carried

it with them to the **second tool checkpoint.**

This time, **no shovel was missing.**

There had been a miscount at the first checkpoint.

The **word spread** like wildfire through the whole camp.

**An innocent man had been willing to die to save the others!**

The incident had a profound effect. The men began to treat each other like brothers. When the victorious Allies swept in, the survivors, human skeletons, lined up in front of their captors, and instead of attacking their captors, they protected them and insisted:

***“No more hatred. No more killing.***

***Now what we need is forgiveness.”***

The sacrifice of one man changed the hearts of those around him.

He faced the punishment to save the others.

**WE can still impact** those around us by our actions.

As long as the **LIGHT** of the **CANDLE OF LOVE** ***glows Brightly.***

Amen.

***CHRISTMAS BLESSING***

I will light candles this Christmas

Candles of joy, despite all the sadness,

Candles of hope where despair keeps watch.

Candles of courage where fear is ever present,

Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,

Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens.

Candles of love to inspire all my living.

Candles that will burn all the year long…

 With the LIGHT of the LOVE of GOD.

*(Adapted from Howard Thurman (1899-1981) – American author, philosopher, theologian, mystic, educator, and civil rights leader)*

 **John 3:14-21**

As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior.

Those who believe in the Son are not judged; but those who do not believe have already been judged, because they have not believed in God's only Son. This is how the judgment works: the light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil. Those who do evil things hate the light and will not come to the light, because they do not want their evil deeds to be shown up. But those who do what is true come to the light in order that the light may show that what they did was in obedience to God.

**1 John 4:8-10**

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.