

Listen to a rewrite of 1 Corinthians 13 for Christmas

If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another decorator.

If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not share the true meaning of Christmas, I'm just another cook.

If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity, but do not demonstrate kindness to strangers, it profits me nothing.

If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties and sing in the choir but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point.

Love stops the cooking to hug the child.

Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the husband.

Love is kind, though harried and tired.

Love doesn't envy another's home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.

Love doesn't yell at the kids to get out of the way, but is thankful they are there to be in the way.

Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return but rejoices in giving to those who can't.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

Love never fails.

Video games will break, pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust, but giving the gift of love will endure.

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."



Christmas midnight and Christmas Morning

Christmas Night:

Eternal God, in the stillness of this night you sent your almighty Word to pierce the world's darkness with the light of salvation: give to the earth the peace that we long for and fill our hearts with the joy of heaven through our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Christmas Morning

Lord Jesus Christ, your birth at Bethlehem draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth: accept our heartfelt praise as we worship you, our Saviour and our eternal God. **Amen.**

Readings Midnight:

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| Isaiah 52:7-10 | OT page 693 |
| Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12) | NT page 215 |
| John 1:1-14 | NT page 88 |

Readings Christmas Day:

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| Isaiah 9:2-7 | OT page 648 |
| Titus 2:11-14 | NT page 212 |
| Luke 2:1-14, (15-20) | NT page 55 |

(NIV used in sermon preparation).

May each of us know the blessings of Christmas as we journey through these few days. I say journey because for many this time of year is very difficult and celebration is a painful experience.

At least celebration as the world displays it is difficult if not impossible ~ many of our church family are missing this Christmas having chosen not to remain at home where the painful emotions are too great, many others are facing Christmas for the first or second year with loved ones missing (celebrating in heaven) and will miss their traditional habits, comments and behaviours, now no more than a precious memories.

There are others whose situation finds them on the streets or facing poverty at home, people working yet having to use the food banks people homeless because of debt, sometimes government inflicted as the benefit system is dysfunctional ~ in situations that are often not of their own making facing Christmas in ways that they never

expected and don't deserve!

That is all very real to individuals ~ part of their journey, part of your journey and part of mine. At Immanuel we know what grief can feel like and the different ways of living with it.

But this is Christmas ~ the Christian time of celebration of the beginning of God's visible love for us. God's love that is ever present even when our life experiences tempt us to shut it out, ignore it or try to destroy it by claiming that God is causing our hurt and pain! Human freewill causes our hurt and grief ~ because it is the way we respond to our situations and select to deny God's total provision for us.

Humanly it is almost impossible for us to accept that God's love takes family and friends through death ~ but would we really want our loved ones to suffer long term simply so we can keep them here in human form? You and I can so easily select what we want to believe about God. So at Christmas what does God want us to believe and understand and how is that different from what we chose to hold on to?

The world declares tinsel, lights, and general overindulgence ~ it promotes spending to show you love someone and that in turn brings guilt or debt and worse.

So if the world's Christmas is all tinsel and turkey ~ what does our Christmas look like? Our Scriptures teach us to rejoice, be glad and hope ~ for God is doing a great thing! Isaiah tells us that it is down to us you and me ~ listen ~

“ How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, (*the world*), your God reigns!”
Isaiah 52: 7

Isaiah also tells us that

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;” *Isaiah 9:2*

So you and I need to know what that great light; that good news is!

Ultimately it is the salvation that is made available to each of us at the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. ~ that can only come to pass because he is given to us as God incarnate at Christmas.

So Christmas is not about the presents ~ spending money we don't have and overindulging to the extent that a New Years resolution (that we won't keep) is to lose the weight gained through our own greed! It is about worshipping the infant child and thanking God for His provision for us. But you and I have to see that provision in all things ~ and that includes our grief. We have to believe that our loss has brought pain and distress to an end or prevented it happening in a long, drawn out debilitating way. We have to trust that God's timing is perfect ~ and that His allowing our loss and hurt is the most loving way He can enable us to stay in relationship with Him. That God is thinking of the individuals He is welcoming into the fulness of the kingdom.

That is really hard because we hurt so badly but that hurts God too!

God's hurt and pain for His people can be seen all through the Old Testament when His people repeatedly tried living without Him and He decided to do something about it!”

That something is Jesus.

So God spent long years trying to prepare His children so that they would be ready. So that you and I will be ready! God can't take away the freedom of choice that He created us with but He can guide us through the choices that He gives us.

Now that does not mean that we don't celebrate with gifts, special food and looking out for those who will be finding things tough ~ it simply means that we understand why we do all these things and do them within our means. We do not enter into the materialistic worldly ways to the point where we jeopardise our longer term well being and we find the courage to learn for ourselves and then teach our children boundaries and expectations that honour God and we stop feeding our greed and fear of rejection because we choose to be different!

Not easy ~ but when we achieve it and tell others the real meaning of Christmas it is a far better feel good factor; a far better future with a lot less pressure and no need for unachievable New Year resolutions. We have the opportunity to make this Christmas different and receive God's Blessings.