

Immanuel United Church

4th Advent Service, Dec 20th, 2020

Welcome

Description of Love (Anne Duncan)

Where did you find peace in the past during difficult times and where do you find peace now?

Today, we light the candle named Peace.

**May its light help us find our way.**

Hymn: VU 7 *Hope is a Star* (V. 1, 2, 3, 4)

**Hope is a star that shines in the night,  
leading us on till the morning is bright.**

Refrain: **When God is a child there's joy in our song.**

**The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,  
and none shall be afraid.**

**Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,  
giving a promise of safety and worth. (Refrain)**

**Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,  
telling the world that the Saviour is born. (Refrain)**

**Love is a flame that burns in our heart,  
Jesus has come and will never depart.  
When God is a child there's joy in our song.  
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,  
and none shall be afraid.**

Call to Worship: (Pat Schulz)

We feel like we have been on the road for a long time.

We are tired and weary.

We long for a place to rest

We ache for a place of safety.

**But we continue our journey one step at a time.**

**We keep our eyes fixed on the star up ahead.**

**We keep moving towards the light that beckons us.**

Very soon the light will grow brighter.

**Very soon, our God of love will send the light of the world to us.**

Let us prepare ourselves for the coming of the light.

**Let us worship together.**

5 Murals and Gospel reading: Walk the Journey through the Advent to Christmas  
(Artists: Eileen Metcalfe, Luba Olesky, Jennifer Antymis; the reader: Lynne Strome)

Luke 2: 4-7

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Hymn: VU 58 *Infant Holy, Infant Lowly*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEdHUVZX6BM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rDVFQmNthQ>

Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 (Al MacKling)

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.' Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.'

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders\* of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

Immanuel Choir: Let there be Joy in this Place (December 16, 2018)

Message:

On Incarnation: the Snowy Owl God

A few years ago, when Jah-bi was younger, we liked watching documentaries on the extraordinary lives of different animals. (National Geographic's were the best, in our experience.) Usually the documentaries focused on the "law of the jungle", but one videographer's work caught my heart with deep emotion. The one-hour film closely followed the life of two snowy owl parents in the landscape of the Far North. The videographer had to

wear a full-body mosquito cover when he was capturing how the snowy owl Mom and Dad endured an extraordinarily challenging environment in order to feed their three youngsters through the winter. Winter is long and harsh near the North Pole; predators must search for signs of life on the wide and vast snow-covered tundra in the split-second moment when their prey comes out from underground. In the video, the snowy owl parents found just one rodent in a whole week and fed their young new-borns, while still hungry and tired themselves. They could barely open their own eyes against the wind and snowflakes and mosquitoes. While watching it, I thought - someone called it a "job hazard" - I want to talk about this one day, in a sermon. I can use it as a good illustration of the parental love God must have for us. The stark and honest description of how God's liberational love enters our lives and feeds us. If we feel that our life circumstances are very tough for us, it would be even tougher for God to find the way to reach us, and reveal God's love to us. Witnessing the persistence and determination of the snowy owls to feed their family opened the understanding to me that God's Incarnate Love must endure something that is almost 'impossibility' (like the North Pole's Winter for survival) before reaching us. Likewise, God must endure the midnight oppression of the occupied land of Palestine by the Roman Empire, before coming out to Israel in the birth of a child (Christ), which we call Incarnation: "The Word (God's parental love) made flesh." In the breath of the child, in the body of the child, in the heartbeat and blood of the child. In the first cry of the baby. Seeing the snowy owls, I remembered my own experience of breastfeeding. After breastfeeding, I laid down my infant son and looked at his plump and soft cheeks and arms and belly, thinking "All of this incredible being is made from what I gave." The word Incarnation comes from Latin, "in - Intro, and caro - carn - Flesh." God being embodied in flesh, or taking on flesh.

Today, we have arrived at the fourth Advent Sunday, just four days shy of Christmas Eve. Traditionally, in this fourth Advent week, we reflect on Love - the liberating love of God. It is an extraordinary love in that it changes our lives. It is also Incarnate Love: "The Word made flesh" is the nature of God's love. Even if, in our faith, Incarnation is fully revealed in Jesus, it perpetually comes to us in myriad new ways. God is like a young child, standing at a mirror or in front of a big window. I don't know about you, but when I was young, I was never able to leave a place without touching anything that was shiny. I was like a raven collecting silver spoons. I had to touch and leave my fingerprints all over these beautiful surfaces. My kids were the same. At the height where their hands could reach, on any mirror or window at our home, I could find their little, lingering, sticky fingerprint graffiti. Incarnation is the same: God is perpetually leaving God's touch of Incarnate Love on the surface of all creation and in our lives. Everywhere! Creative. Complicated. Interconnected. Like an artistically skilled graffiti on the wall, it has a message, grace, freedom. God's love spills down into flesh, takes on flesh.

Today's reading of 2 Samuel belongs to the Hebrew Bible, and was written long before Jesus was born, and yet it offers an insight about God's Incarnate Nature: God prefers entering the world, embodied in the flesh — our bodies and beings — , and being movable, mobile, messy and

miraculous. In other words, God would choose a manger rather than a royal temple for a place of birth. In the story, David wants to build a house for God. His spiritual advisor, Nathan, agrees at first, then, after a dream, pronounces God's verdict on the plans for a temple: "No ... No house ... Not now." God's presence with the people along their journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom has been portable, movable. God does not live in a building, or in a heavenly place, but among the people, the bodies and beings, in the midst of all the complexities of their lives together. God is houseless. God's presence is abundant in the flesh, in the cries of hope of all people.

I have one more story to share with you today. I hope that it can be another way to illustrate God's Incarnate Love. Before doing it, I would like to invite you to think about Incarnation as a narrative, as a story, not just an "event." Some Christians might say Jesus's birth is the only event of God's true Incarnation, and I have no higher spiritual authority to judge its truth, but I would like to suggest that we can still find amazing stories and narratives that show what God's Incarnation, what God's Incarnate Love, would be like and how they are birthed into people's lives. How does it transform the world? How have our lives been changed through this extraordinary love that resembles God's incredible parental love, like the snowy owl's feeding their young in the harsh wilderness of the far North?

This is Pastor Lee Dong-Hwan (Show the picture). On August 31, 2019, Lee, who is part of the Korean Methodist Church, took to the stage of the queer festival, clad in a white robe to bless those in attendance, throwing flower petals and offering a prayer. Just three days afterward, he was required to attend a regional committee meeting in the city where his church was located. A day later on Sept 4th, he was reported to the annual conference for violating the book of Doctrines and Discipline by advocating and agreeing with homosexuality. On Oct 15, this year, he was sentenced to two years of suspension of duty by the Korean Methodist Church, which means he cannot preach for two years; it would almost sever his livelihood and pastoral career during the period. In addition, he received a letter from the Conference not long after, informing him that he had to pay the cost of the church's trial - \$7,200.

Quote from the news article: "Lee's life may have been turned upside down the day he took to the stage at the queer festival, but he has no regrets and says he would do the whole thing over again -- but this time, with a smile." This is where I find the glimpse of God's Incarnate Love: "I have no regrets," he said in the interview. "But there is one thing that I feel a little dissatisfied about. Because I had already gotten so many calls from people from the day before and that very morning, I was so scared when I stood on that stage. I'm really easily frightened (laugh). There were people coming up to ask me 'Are you Lee Dong-Hwan?'" and taking pictures of me from far away for evidence. I started to feel like something was happening and so all the pictures and videos show me with a serious face because I was so nervous. But I should have smiled when I threw the petals -- It was a blessing. If I could go back, I would put on the biggest

smile.” I believe a smile is the most beautiful thing we can put on our face. Not to look friendly but to really bless God’s people by love.

“The Word made flesh.” Hope for peace and joy, love incarnate manifesting in the biggest smile.

Like the snowy owl parent, the houseless God endures extraordinary circumstances to reach us and to bless us, to create a family, a community, an earth, to create change through extraordinary love. Throughout this year’s Advent, I have reflected on Advent with you, in the light of four major themes in the Bible: Exodus, Exile, Apocalypse and Incarnation. What is interesting to me is that the first three are played on geographical landscapes. The liberation in the first three requires migration: crossing over the Red Sea, returning from Babylon to the homeland, New Heaven and New Earth. And yet, the Incarnation is happening in our flesh: Our breath, our body, our heartbeat and blood are the elements of God’s new landscape. We, flesh, the whole creation, are so important to God that Houseless God is born in us. This week, the last of Advent, I invite you to look for the messy hand marks of God’s Incarnate Love in the breath and flesh of the earth, in us, beyond us. We are the mirror of God’s Incarnate Love. The Word made flesh. Merry Christmas! A Child is born! Hallelujah!

Hymn: VU 232 *Joyful, Joyful*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ux\\_U-0LBGLA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ux_U-0LBGLA)

Prayers of the People: (Nancy Sanders)

Hymn: VU 5 *All Earth is Waiting*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhvzz-Z6tcl>

Benediction: Sung Refrain from **Hearth and Fire**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baD9MRrwPOo>

**Hearth and fire be yours tonight and all the dark outside;**

**Fair the night and kind on you wherever you may bide.**

**And God be the sun upon your head, the wind about your face;**

**God’s love upon the path you tread,**

**and upon your wand’rings, peace.**