December 12-18, 2022
Fourth Sunday of Advent
Sermon by Lead Pastor Pete Moon
Sermon Title: “Love Can’t Wait”

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**Family Focus Question (before sermon):**
Take a moment and write down a definition of love as seen in the Bible.

**Questions for small groups (after sermon):**

1. Often when we think of love and marriage, we drift to a sort of Hallmark Card image. Though there is nothing wrong with that, our story with Joseph tends to point us to a deeper understanding. What does love look like in this story?
2. The sermon, in looking at Joseph, makes the case for us as a society putting some focus on boys and men, without sacrificing the wins made by women of late. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? In the words of Tina Turner, “What’s love got to do with it?”
3. Describe the way that Biblical love has the ability to exercise itself in us right now, even when we don’t feel like loving. Think of someone you know right now who represents a challenge to love. What can you do even if you don’t feel like it?

**Monday, December 12: Read Matthew 1:18-25**
If we turn on the Hallmark or Lifetime channels any time in December, we will find a host of Christmas-themed movies about “love.” They also usually involve a handsome prince and a predictable but comforting happy ending. While this kind of Christmas “love” is fine, this week we are going to dive into the deeper Biblical love that goes beyond a warm, fuzzy feeling to involve commitment and action; the kind of love that drives the incarnation. In today’s familiar scripture, let’s go beyond the surface narrative to recognize the incredible love Mary showed for God, her unborn child, and humanity through her acceptance of God’s difficult call. We can also meditate on Joseph’s righteous love for Mary, both before and after he learned of the truth behind her pregnancy. Most of all, we can marvel at the love God showed all of us in the gift of his Son. How do these examples of love compare to the Hallmark Channel? What is similar? Different?
Tuesday, December 13: Read Isaiah 7:10-16
Biblical love is steadfast and unconditional, standing the test of time and keeping its promises. Centuries before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah foresaw a messiah sent from God who was from the house of David, born of a young woman, and called Emmanuel. This messiah will choose good over evil and will come to set people free. This gift of hope, forgiveness, joy, and peace is the embodiment of love. It is given to an imperfect people who will continue to be imperfect, ungrateful, and unbelieving. We know we continue this same way today. Yet God continues to give unconditionally in love. Where else have we seen this type of love in our world and in our lives? How could we better show our appreciation and gratitude for it? How could we better emulate it?

Wednesday, December 14: Read Romans 1:1-7
Many of us are working tirelessly right now to prepare for Christmas. We are buying and wrapping gifts, baking treats, planning meals, and sending cards. This all takes effort, organization, and foresight, yet we enjoy doing it for those we love. Today’s opening passage from Paul’s letter to the Romans beautifully illuminates the type of planning God did to give the gifts of the gospel reaching us today. Notice the action verbs in this passage: called, set apart, promised, descended, declared. Our God is a God of loving action. Likewise, Jesus loves with incredible action, not just words. Where are we witnessing actions that reflect God’s perfect love today? What is one action we can take, right now, that can do the same?

Thursday, December 15: Read Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
Love does not mean always being happy with the actions of the other person. Love does not always mean being happy, period. Today’s psalm shows anxiety, sorrow, and frustration. It also, however, shows faith and faithfulness. Many of us may not be feeling completely happy during this season. Perhaps we are facing loneliness, sorrow, depression, fear, or other mental or physical health challenges. Today’s psalm reminds us that love is not necessarily a feeling; it’s an action. Today, let’s try to do an act of love, even if we are not feeling what our culture tells us we “should” be feeling. Let us also try to recognize and receive love, even when it’s not in the form, frequency, or timeline we expect.

Friday, December 16: Read 1 John 4:16b-21
This incredible passage can give hope and comfort to anyone struggling with the belief that we have to have a Hallmark romance-worthy life in order to enjoy the gifts of love. This Advent, even as we wait for the fruition of God’s kingdom, we do not have to wait for love. When we live in love, we live in God. We can live in confidence and the absence of fear. We can also love NOW, because first, God loved us. The happy ending has already happened – God has declared his love for us, sent the gift of God’s son, and achieved victory over sin and death. When we choose to live in love...now...we can live enjoying these perfect gifts of perfect love. We can’t afford to wait for this!

Saturday, December 17: SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION: 1 John 4:16b
“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.”

Sunday, December 18: Let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship in praying our Prayer of Common Confession: Gracious God, we long to be as loving and courageous as Joseph – brave enough to trust your call and strong enough to hold onto one another. There are so many places in the world that need our love. When fear takes over, forgive us. When our knees shake and our words fail, forgive us. When self-hatred is easier than self-love, forgive us. When walls are more convenient than peace, forgive us. When pessimism is more convenient than hope, forgive us. When our comfort is more important than our neighbor, forgive us. This we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.