

**SERMON: "LOVE EMBODIED"**

**TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT  
NEW TESTAMENT**

**MICAH 5:2-5  
LUKE 1:47-55**

**December 22, 2024  
Fourth Sunday in Advent**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Are you familiar with the 5 love languages?

It is a popular and helpful book by Dr. Gary Chapman

The love languages he points out are based on his work with couples as a counselor and Baptist pastor. His point is that we all have a primary and secondary way of showing love, what we do well

Those five love languages are – words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, acts of service and physical touch. Out of these five, there are some you speak well and others not so much. I'll give you an example.

I'll risk speaking about my own relationship ... and since it drives me nuts when preachers offer themselves up as shiny examples of goodness, I'll name one I'm not so good at

It is gift buying season. Okay, I know just what she wants

My wife is especially beautiful in red and black. What might I get her?

Well lucky me, my favorite team wears red and black

Get her something with a Georgia Bulldog G on it

Merry Christmas and happy anniversary and happy birthday

I'm joking just a bit. I do want to be careful in talking love languages

I'm not selling any popular psychology. His work has its limits

It also can be quite useful. As a matter of fact, I'd like to take his work and stretch it beyond just that one relationship

Yes, it helps in your relationship to know your love languages

But why limit this talk of love languages – how to speak, show and share love?

My question is this (and I ask it from a biblical and theological framework)

What are your love languages when it comes to loving your neighbor?

Jesus commands us to love our neighbors ... how do you do that?

During this Advent season of expectation, we are talking about being embodied

Hope embodied, peace embodied, joy embodied (we had lots of joy embodied with the way our youth and children led worship last week – joy a plenty)

## BELOVED SO BE LOVING

And this week we talk love embodied and do so using the traditional passage for this fourth Sunday of Advent, the song of Mary from Luke, chapter one  
It is a song with two parts - one personal and the other public  
Think a solo to start and big bold choir anthem, with brass, to finish

**And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for God who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.**

Mary begins her song of praise singing of what God has done for her.  
An opening word of praise **"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior"** is followed by the reason for that praise ...  
**"for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant."**

God who is mighty has done great things for Mary. So she sings the praise of this God who'd reach way down the ladder of what we call success to bless a rather ordinary young woman. So we join with her and sing along to celebrate her good news.  
But it is not just her good news, is it? The child will himself be love embodied  
He will be God's love embodied and lived out throughout his life  
and through death and resurrection

Talk about our love languages for how we are to love our neighbor  
does not begin with this Presbyterian pastor's sermon or a Baptist pastor's book  
It doesn't begin with you or me, he or she, us or them ... It begins with God  
With God's love for us, with God's favor shown to us  
Think of it this way ... "we are beloved, so be loving"

Please be sure not to get the cart before the horse.  
Christianity isn't about us – what we do or how we do it.  
It is about Christ – what he has done and how he has done it.  
It starts with him, with Jesus. God's son. Mary's child

Mary's song announces that good news  
First with God's goodness to her ... then with what this promised child will do  
This is where Mary's solo swells to include a great choir of voices  
I can hear them singing and swaying like a gospel choir

Mary's song becomes the people's song. The God who had regard for Mary's low estate has that same regard for all who are down and out and overlooked.  
Notice 'who's who' in the lyrics, who is being helped ... the balancing

## LOVE LANGUAGES FOR LOVING NEIGHBORS

Mary isn't daydreaming about how things might be better for her personally, she talking about a whole new world where things have changed for all the people.

**God's mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, he has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy ...**

This is what God is going to do through this child. This is how the living God shows and speaks love, scattering the proud and lifting up the lowly. Might these be the love languages we are to speak as we answer the call to love our neighbors?

I would say they are because what Mary sings about here in chapter one is what Jesus proclaims in his first public message in chapter four and what he lives out in all the remaining chapters – that same focus

His life and love, words and work regularly challenged the powerful (esp. leaders in religion) about how they used their power. He lifted up the lowly, he filled the hungry with good things. And yes there are several stories of those who are rich walking away because Jesus challenged them

Does Jesus challenge you? Yes, Jesus challenges us because he loves us. He challenges us to love our neighbors. How might we do that? What love languages might we speak as we love our neighbors?

What do you hear in Mary's song?  
Something about how we relate to those in power  
Scattering the proud or bringing down those on thrones  
Lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry with good things.

What might that look like for us ... to do the things Mary sings about?  
What would it look like to speak those 'love your neighbor' love languages?

I'm not going to stretch this language about love languages too much more. Not going to try and fit loving our neighbors into five neat categories. There are lots of good ways to be a good neighbor, to do good. I do think it is a healthy question to ask of ourselves, a question about how we are to do what Jesus has so very clearly put on our 'to do' list

## SUMMARY

I read a great book on continuing education last month, The Widening of God's Mercy by Christopher and Richard Hays, father and son, both biblical scholars. The father, Richard, wrote a book published in 1996, Moral Vision, that has often been referenced in the ongoing debates in the church about human sexuality. Referencing his early work, he writes at the beginning of this new book

*I thought that those judgments could start a conversation rather than end one, but subsequent developments have shown that I was naïve. Many traditionalists and conservatives have seized upon that one chapter as the final word, as a cover for exclusionary attitudes and practices wrapped in more "compassionate" packaging. I fear the rhetoric of my chapter left itself open to such uses. I acknowledge that I bear responsibility for the pain such developments have caused to many believers who belong to sexual minorities. And for that I am deeply sorry.*

The rest of their new book lays out the reasoning behind his change of mind and heart. It is a thorough walk-through scripture ... not just an analysis of a few verses taken from their context and over inflated in their relevance to the whole of the biblical story. That is the genius of the book ... and the reason I bring it up today.

The question about what the bible says is just that – what does the bible say? Not what does this one verse I looked up to prove my point say? You remember doing book reports in school? The purpose was to identify the major themes of the book, what the author was trying to say. How about we think of the bible that way?

Working on this passage from Luke chapter one this week, that kept coming to mind. What Mary is saying (even singing) about the child is not a one off. Jesus himself will say much the same in chapter four about being anointed 'to bring good news to the poor, sent to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free'

It is the same thing Jesus would do throughout Luke – heal the sick, love the sinner. Throughout their new book, Christopher and Richard Hays present the same compelling argument that Luke does ... The story of Jesus is about the widening of God's mercy. It sure as heaven is not about restricting that mercy, not about limiting that love. It is about the widening of God's mercy.

That is what the book of Luke is all about, what the Bible is all about. About the widening of God's mercy. Put that in your book report! Better yet ... make it one of your love languages. Love your neighbor by widening your mercy.