My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Eternal God of our Advent expectant bodies, minds, hearts and spirits, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in Your sight. Our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

We’ve talked about seeing God through everything and everyone, haven’t we? Jesus tells us this…that we can come to new understanding of Kingdom living if we have ears that can hear, and eyes that can see. It requires us to literally look at life differently, from a point of God’s purposes and how our lives of service might figure into that purpose.

Have you had God moments this Advent, moments in which you saw peace, hope, and joy unfold these last few weeks? Do the Advent calendars and wreaths you have at home help keep us mindful of that? We DO have Advent calendars and wreaths at home, right? I said, Riiight? OK. I know most of us don’t but the point remains—God truly can be viewed through many lenses in the ordinary world when we think we’re just being blown along through life.

I’m reminded on this fourth Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Love, of a song I loved growing up. It was by the rock group Foreigner, titled, “I Want to Know What Love Is.”

Remember that one? Let’s review the lyrics, not so much with the longing for a romantic interest, but what if those were written as an allegory for our faith life, and for our scriptures? Close your eyes for a minute, and listen to this:

I’ve Gotta take a little time; a little time to think things over.

Better read between the lines, in case I need it when I’m older.

Now this mountain I must climb, feels like the world on my shoulders

Through the clouds I see love shine, it keeps me warm as life gets colder.

How about it? Do you think that our Mary might have felt this way being told that she would bear God’s child? Listen a little further. Close your eyes again.

In my life, there’s been heartache and pain

I don’t know if I can face it again

Can’t stop now, I’ve traveled so far to change this lonely life.

I wanna know what love is; I want you to show me.

I wanna feel what love is; I know you can show me.

How about David’s crazy journey through life, the Psalms he wrote, the longing and wanting for God described therein?

These words of scripture and popular culture both make us more awake and aware for one thing: We long for that relationship which we can count on, no matter what befalls us, and that we can call on even when we are uncertain. I don’t know about you, but for many of us we can count those relationships on one hand, and they don’t always include families or bloodlines. But the longing, the need for love that is steadfast and enduring, is a universal human need.

And the holidays, as much as the Hallmark Channel’s movies tell us are full of otherwise, are full of stress. We put on a brave face and greet each other with smiles, but we know more and more families which are under economic pressure, even devastation, by our current pandemic. The air is getting heavy with grief as we know personally more folks who have contracted COVID-19 and we pray that they are not the ones who will die or suffer long term health effects from it. We grieve many things that make us question whether the future, much less the present, is reliable—losses in jobs, people, holidays, opportunities, experiences, time with others, or time alone for that matter, and just the everyday community of church and its rhythm. We are SAD, even as we tell ourselves that we are full of holiday joy.

Let me give you another image. You remember *Frozen*, the movie, right? Have you seen *Frozen 2*? Yeah? Well, our little snowman, Olaf is walking alone in the enchanted forest and all kinds of strangeness is happening around him: leaves pick him up and drop him, giant boulders roll toward him, and he feels like he’s being spied on or even pursued. His world is really disordered and he’s a little beyond worried, isn’t he?

As he walks, Olaf reassured himself, with sayings like, “This is fine…” “This is normal.” And “This will all make sense when I’m older”. Our hearts just cry out for Olaf, because we’ve all been there. Although he has no injuries, he’s not exactly ‘fine’. He’s alone and confused and afraid, isn’t he?

Have we been there?

What do you think David thinks of his life up to this point of our scripture? How do we think Mary might have felt when an ANGEL OF THE LORD appears to an unwed young teen in a small agrarian town and announces that she is to bear the Son of God?

Gotta take a little time, a little time to think things over.

Better read between the lines, in case I need it when I’m older.

*Feels like the world is on my shoulders, indeed.*

Olaf has all these things on his mind but he knows that if he’s going to make it to the other side of the forest, he has to keep putting one snowy foot in front of the other. Mary has her own societal narratives of shame and self-doubt that have crept into her mental well-being. Even the mighty King David at this point had real angst; God had rejected David’s plan to build a temple, something that he thought would really please the God he loved…how could he show God the depth of his feeling, and his longing?

All of these images call out to us, they call out to our hearts as the words of our song, for assurance for our hearts that all will be well in a world that continually shifts away from stability and our expectations that we can control the outcome of our journeys. We long for peace for our hearts. Hope for our futures. Joy for our current efforts. And to undergird all of these, *we* wanna know what love is. We want you to show us, O God, *we* know you can show *us*.

Mary takes a little time. A little time to think things over, when she goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth, and she goes to ask her advice, to read between the lines, because we know that she will definitely need this when she’s older. She takes time to discern, distill, integrate, communicate, and follow the gifts of mercy, strength, humility, and charity that well up from within her when she sings the Magnificat.

But it is the innocence of a young teen that shines through in her song, someone who was no longer awe-struck by her life situation. You and I would have to push away our fear like Olaf does—“This is fine! This is normal!”—in order to make it through, because the world has conditioned us that we should trust ourselves and our senses more than the immediate, visceral, ongoing sense of the divine. We are just too used to the world and how it betrays love, and we choose to believe something else rather than what can be. Because that love could never be what really IS. We want to know what love IS. So we are presented with this choice aren’t we?

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

Our Advent journey is what we make of it, where we find it. We can be like Olaf, to try and make sense of it all when we’re older, but that makes us miss the here and now because it can’t be believed. But belief implies a degree of certainty, and some kind of intellectual assent: we have weighed the facts and circumstances, and believe this but not that. So maybe belief isn’t what we need right now. We need the different eyes and ears to see differently in Advent.

Hope, peace, joy, and yes, love, are things which are not easily defined. Germans call this “Hertzlich” and often say to each other “Hertzliche Grusse”, or “heartfelt greetings.” Can you imagine saying that to each other? Why not? The heart, where all these things are felt, is the crescendo of Advent. Because the heart doesn’t balk at the ridiculous, the unbelievable, but it propels us forward into God’s grace and love chasing after us. Before we know it, we’ll see that they have caught up, and are changing this lonely life, and are holding us fast.

Thanks be to God, Amen.