Worship Service Theme: Fourth Sunday of Advent: LOVE

Helpful Elements:
Christmas hymnal and sing-along recordings
Purple table covering
Advent stand and electric candles
Advent banner
Nativity scene (separate table)

Welcome: Welcome! My name is ____ and I'll be leading our worship time today. Today is the fourth and final Sunday of Advent. The word "advent" comes from the Latin word "adventus," which means "arrival" or "coming." Advent is the season before Christmas when the church remembers and celebrates the coming of Christ to Earth and looks forward to Jesus' return in glory.

(Turn on the candles of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love – or have someone in the front row "light" them.) In our first weeks of Advent, we lit the **PURPLE** candle of hope; then the **PURPLE** candle of peace; then the **PINK** candle of joy. Today, we light the final **PURPLE** candle of love, remembering how the birth of Jesus brought hope, peace, joy, and love into the world.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening prayer: God of hope, who brought love into this world,
be the love that dwells among us.
God of hope, who brought peace into this world,
be the peace that dwells among us.
God of hope, who brought joy into this world,
be the joy that dwells among us.
God of hope, the rock we stand upon,
be the center, the focus of our lives

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always, and particularly during this Advent season. We pray in your holy name. Amen.[1]

Hymns:
Joy to the World
O Come O Come Emmanuel

First reading: Isaiah 40:1-5 (NIV)

1 Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hardship has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.
3 A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.
4 Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
5 And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:
It Came Upon the Midnight Clear
The First Noel

Second reading: 1 John 4:7-12 (NLT)

[1] http://faithandworship.com/prayers_Advent.htm

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7 Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God.
Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. **8** But anyone who does not
love does not know God, for God is love.

9 God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into
the world so that we might have eternal life through him. **10** This is real love—not
that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take
away our sins.

11 Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each
other. **12** No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and
his love is brought to full expression in us.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:
Angels We Have Heard on High
Good Christian Friends, Rejoice

Interactive Homily: Let's talk more about love.

- We typically say we "love" a particular thing. What kinds of things do you love? *(generate lots of ideas in all categories)*
    - People, pets, food, painting, piece of music, even self.
    - We love these things in different ways, right? We don't say that we love a person the same way we love pizza ☺ So there are many kinds of love.
- Let's think a bit beyond "feelings" of love. How would it feel if someone said they *felt love* for you … but never *showed* you that they loved you?
    - Empty words! Not reassuring or genuine. Talk is cheap.
- If love isn't just a feeling or empty words, what is love? How do we complete love or prove that love is real and genuine?
    - We *show* love through *actions*.
- As an example, let's think about the Christmas season. How do some people show that they *really love* Christmas? For example, what do a lot of people who "love Christmas" do with their houses during the holidays, inside and out?
    - Decorations! What kind?
        - Lights, nativity scene on the front lawn, Christmas tree(s), nutcrackers, stockings, wreaths …
- What's another way that we traditionally show love at Christmastime, often on Christmas morning?

    - We give gifts as symbols of love for another.
- Why might we call Christmas itself a gift? What happened at the first Christmas?
    - Jesus was born! "They shall call his name Immanuel, God With Us."
    - The great reminder at Christmas is that God doesn't just *feel* love toward us. "God *showed* how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is *real love*…" (1 John 4:9-10, NLT)
- So how would you describe God's love – what is God's love like?
    - First clue: *Who* did God send Jesus to?
        - EVERYONE. God's love is universal. Jesus came *to the world* – not just a special subset of humanity. God loves *every single person*, no exceptions.
    - Second clue: *When* does God love us?
        - ALWAYS. God's love is eternal. God sent Jesus to draw us to God forever: "so that we might have eternal life." This was and is the purpose of Christmas, the greatest gift ever given.
- As the apostle John wrote, "If we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to *full expression* in us" (1 John 4:12). As people of faith, how can show God's love? How can we "decorate ourselves" to show God's love to other people? What loving actions can we do during this season to share God's love?
    - *Tell* someone how you feel about them! Go beyond simply "I love you" and tell people *what qualities* you love about them.
    - Share a favorite memory or story with someone.
    - Write a card or call on the phone.
    - Do something helpful for someone else: offer to wash or dry dishes, fold laundry, get them a glass of water or a cup of tea … [*generate ideas*]
    - When you wake up every day, start by saying "thank you" to God for his love.

… Let's take a moment to silently pray and reflect on God's love and ways we can spread God's love to the world.

(Silent Prayer) … Lord, in your love and mercy, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:
Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily

bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Hymns:
Go Tell it on the Mountain
Away in a Manger

Third Reading: God's Love: Spoken Word Poem
by Amanda Moore[2] [*to make it shorter, leave out the bracketed sections]*

How do we begin to comprehend something so great and mighty
A love that we don't even have to work for
A love that's pure
A love that's sure
A love that cures loneliness and depression
Can heal every wound in our souls along with abandonment and rejection
A love that pours out but never runs out
God's love will never see a recession
It's such a blessing to be loved by a God that loved us before we knew we needed his love
That touched us before we knew we needed his touch
That hugged us before we knew we needed his hug

[Oh to be comforted by a God that not only loves but is the very nature and essence of it
A God that would send his one and only Son while we were unlovable sinners
And then we still run from it**]**

But our game of hide and seek is no match for a God that refuses to allow anything to get in the way of his love
Death or life can't block it
Angels nor rulers can't stop it
Things present nor things to come can't halt it
No type of power can break it

[2] https://youtu.be/u8MwBbVSebI?si=Ty5Xqxm-kFQmuFVL

No height nor depth can shake it
Nothing in all creation will make it
Because absolutely nothing
Will be able to separate us from the agape love that comes from our Father

[There's no conditions
No restrictions
No hidden agenda
There's nothing missing
There's nothing like it
There's nothing better
A constant flow of his love
A never-ending love letter
It fills you up
It heals you within
There's no comparison
We can't liken it to the love that comes from men
Because God's love is patient
His love is kind
Timeless yet always on time
Unconditional, multidimensional
His love is authentic
His love is the original**]**

It's refreshing
Rest in it
It's life-changing
Live in it
And it's personal
A gift especially for you

Hymns:
What Child is This
Silent Night

Fourth Reading: Jesus Loves Me[3]

[3] https://storiesforpreaching.com.au/category/sermonillustrations/gods-love/;
https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2013/01/did-karl-barth-really-say-jesus-loves-me-this-i-know/

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Karl Barth was one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century. Barth possessed a brilliant mind and wrote thousands of words exploring faith, theology, and culture.

A story is told that, toward the end of his life, Barth gave a lecture at the University of Chicago Divinity School. At the end of the lecture, an audience member asked Barth if he could sum up all of his life's work in theology in a single sentence.

Karl Barth paused for a moment, then smiled and said, "Yes, I can. In the words of a song I learned at my mother's knee: 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"

Hymn:
Jesus Loves Me (sing a capella)

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word "Lord")
The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymns:
O Come All Ye Faithful
We Wish You a Merry Christmas

Extra material:
John 13:34-35
Just before he died, Jesus washed his followers' feet, and then said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

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