

**Series: NOTEWORTHY. ORDINARY ACCOUNTS OF AN EXTRAORDINARY DAY**

MONDAY DECEMBER 24. 2018

**LOVE NOTES**

**John 1:1-2,14; 3:16, Luke 2:1-14**

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1. How many of you have ever received a *love note*? How many of you have ever *sent* a love note? How many of you would like to receive a love note right about now? Love makes us feel all awkward and squishy and hot—and a little nervous.

-Sometimes it starts early; a note with a heart on it—and big block letters: I LIKE YOU! DO YOU LIKE ME? CHECK YES OR NO. And when it goes to the one you like, there's this sudden sense of feeling vulnerable—naked! In fishing terms, it's like fishing; you drop the bait off the dock. If there's a nibble—you're ecstatic. If there *is* no response, you usually have your answer.

-Sometimes people express their love in, well, *odd* ways. I know *you've* never done that, but I have. In Grade 6, I liked this girl, Lauren Nethery—and found out that she liked some of the same stuff I did! That's a sure clue that God is behind love, right?

**So I caught a grass snake and gave it to her!**

She was surprised and delighted. *More* surprised than delighted, I think.

- a. Of course, as you grow up—the notes get a little more sophisticated. Here's what I know; the worst feeling in the world is to make your love vulnerable—and then be ignored or rejected. The quandary is that *can't* love *without* making yourself vulnerable.
- b. That's what you see and hear in a *lot* of the songs and movies around the Christmas season.

***All I Want for Christmas is You...Baby!* Or, *Last Christmas, I gave you my heart...the very next day, you gave it away.***

-And the *Hallmark Channel*? Oh my goodness. But all this is actually pretty accurate—cause Christmas, at the core, is about love. It's about vulnerability. At the core, Christmas is a *love note*—without the usual stuff about *getting someone you want to give you their love*.

- c. It's about the most loving and generous Being in the universe being vulnerable—and offering His love in a way we can understand and receive it. It's not gushy, sentimental—you know, like a *Velvet Elvis*. But it's *powerful*. And it requires a response—from me *and* from you.

So I want to take a few minutes, this Christmas Eve, to explain this **Love Note**—okay?

2. A lot of people in our world—especially the west--would say that they believe in a Divine Being who is pure love and kindness and compassion. If you do a little research, you find that this image of God is seen no where else except in the Bible or the *Holy Writings*.

-And the record actually **describes** God's love in ways we **all** instinctively know. When you **love** someone—you want to be with them. When you **love** someone—you'd do **anything** to protect them from being hurt—or their lives from being wrecked. And that describes **God's love for us!**

-But the other more painful part about love is that you cannot force someone to love you. You can **offer** your love—but for someone to truly love you—there has to be the freedom to **not** love you.

-So every day, God gives his gifts to people—to you and me and even the most evil people in the world. He give us food to eat, shelter to live in, friends to love and enjoy—and the opportunities we have to thrive and prosper; to love and accept...and to love and be accepted.

-Sometimes we **recognize** these as gifts from God; sometimes we just grab them and run—like spoiled kids;

- a. We're frustrated by the pain and injustice and difficulty we experience—and makes the world, at times, a miserable place to be. Through the years, God told people that He would send a **Good** King—and **Anointed** King to make all things whole and right. **A Messiah.**

-And He laid it all out through prophecy; that this king would be born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem—very human, and yet God with us. Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. Unlike other kings, **He** would bring forgiveness and justice and healing to everyone. That **His Kingdom would never end!**

- b. This night, **Christmas**—is when God's love became real—and vulnerable. Just so we wouldn't miss what was happening, God sent angels—supernatural messengers--to announce His arrival. And to show that this Messiah was Good News for **everyone**—the angels appeared to shepherds watching sheep—people who were kinda at the bottom of the food chain in that culture. The angel said:

**“Don't be afraid. I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”**  
**Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.” (Luke 2:10-14 NLT)**

3. Christmas marks the specific time in the history of everything when all that God had promised for 1000s of years suddenly happened that night in Bethlehem. And it all happened **when** the prophet Daniel said it would—500 years earlier.

-The air of expectancy in the world had reached a crescendo—and Caesar Augustus was claiming that **he** was the son of God—and forcing others to call him **Lord**. And then the **real** Son of God, the **real** Lord showed up—and Caesar became a footnote in the history books. The people of that culture expected a warrior. What **no one** expected was a **baby**. Not a superhero with a cape—just a tiny, squalling red and wrinkled infant. Needy. Nursing from and being changed by a young teenage Mom. And poor! How many babies are born

outside—and then laid in a feeding trough in a fly-infested environment? Love got *personal* and became *vulnerable*.

- a. John, one of first to follow Jesus painted that same picture quite differently.

**In the beginning, the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. ...So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Fathers one and only son. (John 1:1-3,14 NLT)**

-It's *hard* to get your mind around this, isn't it? How does the One who has always existed—and created everything we see *fit into a feeding trough* as 6 pounds of red, wrinkled squalling baby? It's *love*. God's love note to us—vulnerable—and *rejectable!*

- b. History confirms what happened by the fact that all of history shifted that night. The world, from that point on, changed—in terms of art, education, medical care, how injustice is treated, how people are treated—Jesus changed *everything*. Check the books—from that moment on, humility—which had been seen as a flaw, a weakness—was changed into a *strength!*
- c. Jesus told us *why* He came at the Father's request;

**This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. (John 3:16-17 MSG)**

-Jesus came as an expression of God's love—to change us—and *through* us—the world.

- c. What we are *not* told is...**HOW**. Oh, we know some of the facts, I suppose—but explaining *how* God made Himself that vulnerable? Only this. Paul wrote these words:

**Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. (Philippians 2:6-7 NLT)**

-If you're a parent, you have an idea of what it's like to humble yourself out of love for someone under your care, right? It doesn't really matter how high you fly in the marketplace or how much you own or how important others think you are—*parenting* involves *humbling* yourself. Vulnerability. Making yourself *rejectable*.

-You come home from your corner office—where *everyone* tries to please you—and get something from you—and then getting on the same level as your kids, changing poopy diapers, and playing peek-a-boo. Making a fool of yourself with cutsie-pie words

-And if you've been a parent for a while—you know that you are *very* vulnerable to rejection and defiance and disappointment—being treated like no one else would *dare*

treat you! It's **offering your love and yourself**—not knowing if you'll be loved and accepted in return.

- d. And Jesus didn't just become vulnerable, wrapped up in that manger. That's how He **lived**. He loved, healed, helped and raised people from the dead—some of whom stood in Pilates courtyard yelling, **Nail him to a cross! We have no king but Caesar!**

Even in all that—he **still loved his enemies**—who, eventually, got what they wanted. His death. Rejecting and murdering someone who truly, truly loves you has to be the ultimate in evil. It's not just a **love note** that is ignored. It's spit on—nailed on a cross or over the grave of the one who gave it. **For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...**

-In the ultimate, most **profound** sense—Jesus fully lived his best known description of love: **Do for others what you would want them to do for you!** Three days later when he walked out of the grave, Jesus proved: **LOVE ALWAYS WINS!**

5. You get it, right? Christmas is not a cute story about a tiny baby born under difficult circumstances - who then rose above it all to become the most respected person in the world. It's about **love personified**. It's about love displayed in it's most **profound** and **vulnerable** form.

-I'm not sure what this image stirs up in you. See, in the arena of **love**, there's a **lot** of manipulation that goes on, When we see ads about children who have to drink dirty water—or pets that have been abandoned—and the point is to create **compassion**—or at the very least, **pity**: **"I need to DO something about that!"** And we **do!**

-But this scene is given—not so we'll feel sorry for Jesus; but so we'll see the extent of **love made small and vulnerable**.

- a. Have you ever had someone try to manipulate your love? In its worst form, it becomes, "If you don't notice me and love me, I'll **hurt myself!**" That's not love; it's **obsession; mental illness!** Sometimes people give extravagant gifts or make extravagant promises to get attention; but **real** love can't be bought. Love is offered—and then either **received** or **not received**.
- b. If you've ever offered someone your love through a note—or a text—or an Instagram—or on facetime—or even with a glance, you know that an offer of love can be rejected outright—flipped off—or ignored, hoping for a better offer.

\*Sometimes we're **just not that into** the person who's offering it! When I was university, there was this girl I liked—and I tried calling her a number of times—too many times. She either wasn't there or was busy. I finally saw her in the cafeteria and said, "Hi! I've been trying to call you!" She said, "Yeah—**can't you take a hint! I'm not interested!**" Augh!

\*Sometimes we're just too busy. Sometimes we're waiting for a better offer. Sometimes we're suspicious and cautious—cause we've been hurt. Sometimes we're shocked and overwhelmed.

- c. Jesus birth that Christmas night stirred up all **kinds** of responses—and it has ever since. Herod, the sitting king in Israel, responded with hostility and paranoia—and sent soldiers to kill him. Most people aren't that violent—but, to be honest, a lot of people would say, "Hey, **I'm** king of my own life—and you're not gonna be the boss of me!"

\*The shepherds were surprised and curious and they came to see what was going on—and then told everyone in the town what they saw.

\*Maybe the best response came from the Magi—Persian astrologers who were **expecting** and **looking** for this king—maybe because of Daniel's influence. And they didn't just come in from the fields—they traveled over 1000 kilometers to see this newborn King—and responded by worshipping Him—and offer Him their very best.

- d. But there's one more response that may fit us more than the others. Joseph and Mary came into Bethlehem that night—Mary **very** pregnant and possibly in labor. They came to an inn—or a hostel—and someone turned them away. **No room!** Let me read you the account:

**So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. (Luke 2:4-7 NIV)**

-See, I don't think the person running the guest house was an evil or nasty or selfish person. There **just wasn't any room!** Frankly, I think we **may** have the same problem in 2018

6. Tonight, in closing, I want to talk about this problem for a minute—of **just not having any space for Jesus in our lives.**

There was a time in my life, years ago, when I was **just too busy.** I mean, They were all valid things. I was speaking 4 times a week, planning and leading worship. Planning and leading Elder's meetings and Board meetings, doing some stuff for the national office, visiting people in the hospital, doing weddings and funerals and working on a doctorate.

-What I didn't see clearly was that my primary responsibility was not all that stuff; it was Lori—and, at that time, my three children. I definitely **loved** them—but it's pretty hard to love when your hair is on fire and you're trying to respond to everyone's call for help.

-See, what we have to realize is that God is not impressed with what **we're** impressed with—and the things we do to impress **others.** One word sums up what He's done for us —and what He expects from us. **LOVE!**

- a. We have more stuff than we ever have to keep us busy. Work. Cars. Our iPhones nag us for constant attention. Posting selfies. Staying fit. Making money. Shopping. Making **more** money to pay for the shopping. Here's what I know; a **lot** of us are way too busy doing our own thing to even hear the knock on the door.

-It's not that we're too busy for love. People fall in **LUV**—and it's **amazing** the kind of time they can find to buy gifts, sent texts and meet in motels when they think they're gonna get a **luv fix!** I mean, we'd **like** to think that the One who has the power to do anything would join our fan club and help us get a few of our favorite things!

-And the **truth** about me—and about you—is that we actually **create** the time and space for what we really love and want.

It's hard to admit, but in a world like ours, what we **really** want is some form of success—or attention—or status; it's an itch that needs scratched. It's **peace** with ourselves—or with others. Or peace in this part of us that thinks, "If I can **only** get...[this]...I'll be satisfied, I'll calm down, I'll be at **peace!**"

- b. Let me be a little more crass about this, if you don't mind. Remember the girl I told you about—who told **me** that I needed to pick up the clue phone? Well, the **truth** is that she was interested in a good friend of mine—and was waiting for **him** to call.

-And we can be the same way. God has become vulnerable. God has become **reject-able**. There, in that manger or, in our culture, the shopping cart, God's love note. Sometimes we pretend we don't notice—cause **we're waiting for a better offer!** And as **we** wait—trying everything else—He waits. Here's the difference: He has **eternity** and **we don't!**

- c. When love is offered—it **always** demands a response. And if we **don't** respond? Well, that's a response, too. The **offer** of love at Christmas is not a cute story about a little baby "who taught us that in loving and giving we find our own happiness." It's **God** becoming vulnerable—offering us love and hope and life. John puts it like this:

**He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.**  
(John 1:10-12 NLT)

-Is there a cost to accepting His love? Yes. See, truly loving Him not like making Him #3 or #4 on your shopping list or priorities; He's **Lord of all!** The call is to love Him with **all we are**—just like He loved us with **all He is**.

-But the price tag on flipping Him off for a better deal is **WAY** greater! See, He alone offers **life**. He alone offers **hope** and **joy**. Ultimately? To reject his offer of love is to reject everything you really want!

- d. Right now...tonight...it's quiet. All is calm, all is bright. The busyness and shopping is over. There's space to think. And the gift of love that God offers in his Son Jesus—will **change your life**.

-See, the gift He offers is Jesus. It's love in its most vulnerable form. And receiving God's gift of his **Son** brings something we don't expect that satisfies all the needs and itches we can't scratch—**peace**.

-So. This Christmas...**tonight**...it's your move. Jesus—God's love in human form—is exposed; vulnerable. And you and I have to decide what our response to His love is! And **LOVE is the right choice**.