

Lisa Herndon: Advent Weekly – Love
12/23/19

I'm from a small town. In a small town when you meet someone in kindergarten, more than likely you'll still know that person when you graduate high school. In my kindergarten class there was a boy named Heath. On the first day of kindergarten Heath picked his nose. From that day on, Heath was known as the kid who picked his nose. He was the kid on the playground who was avoided. He was the kid who brought Heath bars for his birthday but no one would eat them. By the time we got to high school, the direct bullying had stopped, but he was still the kid that everyone avoided.

I don't recall ever directly making fun of Heath. (That would be mean, right!?) But I also don't ever recall standing up for him. Or playing with him at recess. Or even sitting down beside him. So much in me seeks influence, power, success, and popularity. I wasn't popular myself. I was so afraid that if I befriended him it would take away the very small bit of influence that I had.

Often when we talk about God's love we skip straight to the cross. And it's no wonder. The sacrifice made for us was great. World Changing. Lifesaving. There's a reason we celebrate it every week. But advent helps us to remember that the way the Lord arrived and the way Jesus lived his life mattered.

One of the lessons I find in the manger is this: Love shows up.

Love shows up in unexpected places -- in mangers, at wells, at parties, and even in the temple trying to change the minds and hearts of the teachers.

Love shows up to the underserving -- teenage girls with little power and influence, tax collectors, and even the Pharisees who tried to catch him off-guard at every turn.

Love shows up for the broken-hearted – touching and healing those who no one else would touch.

And the list goes on. I often feel like I need to make some sort of grand plan for Kingdom service, but the truth is that the brokenhearted and ignored are all around us. They're in our extended families. They're in our workplaces and classes. They're in our pews.

The older I get the clearer it becomes to me that the amount of impact I have in the world is directly related to the level at which I make myself available to others. Not necessarily on a grand, public scale -- but in the everyday. When I slow down. When I listen. When I notice. When I make room in my heart for those who might be different than me. When I set aside my fear and look for the people around me that the world avoids and ignores. That's when I live like the Jesus of the manger.

Prayer: Lord, this week as we light the candle representing love we celebrate you as Emmanuel, *God with us*. Thank you for being a God who shows up. Empower us through your Holy Spirit to be a people who are known as friends who show up, who make space for others in our days and in our hearts. We wait in anticipation for the time when you will come again.