

WEEK 4: THE CANDLE OF *Love*

“Momma, can you snuggle with me on the coucha?” asks my 4 year old as I rush around doing evening chores. I quickly finish up the dishes or laundry and make my way to the coucha (a new word for couch and sofa coined by my niece) and find that Claire has set out blankets and pillows in preparation for our time together. As I flop down on the blankets, I refrain from asking her what I’ve asked so many times before. I used to ask her what she wanted to do, thinking she might want to read a story or play a game, but after being met with blank stares, I’ve learned that being together is in fact just the thing she wants to do. And, I’m honoured to just be close to her, and be loved by her in those moments.

Luke recounts a moment in his gospel where love comes near. An angel from heaven comes to earth, to a poor, young girl in the village of Nazareth. This image of the Annunciation by Fritz Eichenburg shows Mary with her face turned toward Gabriel, so close that it appears Gabriel might be whispering God’s favor to her, something that the angel mentions twice. It’s often thought that God’s favor is earned by our behavior - that God’s love is earned by what we give to him. However, the good news is precisely the opposite - God chooses Mary because she has nothing. Being male and being mature were two things that were valued in Mary’s culture, and Mary identifies herself as poor and lowly in her song of praise in response to the angel’s message (the Magnificat). Eichenburg depicts Mary in plain clothes, on a rustic wooden bench, with homey details like a sewing basket. Perhaps if Eichenburg were to illustrate this same scene in a modern-day setting, Mary might be curled up on a coucha. God comes near to us in the ordinary places and whispers love.

And God choosing a poor and lowly girl shows how God acts when he comes near. Mary proclaims with joy that God’s reign has broken through the status quo- love has turned the world upside down! When God comes near there is a powerful and loving reversal of how life as we know it is ordered. God will scatter, bring down, and send away the proud, powerful and rich. He will lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things. The saviour to be born will be called Immanuel - God with us - and he will be with his people to bring love like no one has experienced before. This illustration called Christ of the Breadlines, also by Eichenburg, is a powerful reminder of the way God is found among the poor - that he will come down to lift up. This is a profound expression of generous love.

It’s an honour to be up close and experience the work that we do among the poor through our CBM partners around the world as we experience the love of Christ in and through the poor. Each food basket, goat, latrine, and sewing machine is given in love as we serve Christ through the poor. Each workshop for training pastors, home built for refugees, and school supplies for orphans are given and received in love.

This Advent season, as you draw near to the ones you love whether it’s around a table, in a church, virtually on a screen, or snuggled on a coucha, remember and celebrate that God is near to you in Jesus - the greatest gift of love. And that you too can extend Christ’s love as you draw near and serve others.

Prayer:

Loving God, thank you for drawing near. In this Advent season I commit to making room. Thank you for loving me in my weakness, my brokenness and my poverty, and choosing me even though I have little to give. Help me to see you, and serve you, in the poor around me, that I might know the fullness of your love.

Amen.