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Sermon – John 15:9-17  
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

“God with us” is the ultimate mystery and celebration of our faith. The idea that God would be so humbled as to join our human nature has captured the imaginations of spiritual seekers over the millennia. Jesus comes each Christmas and makes a home in our hearts, but first he was born in human flesh to teach us through his actions how to love, and not just feel love, but be loving to one another. Abide in God’s love that your joy may be complete. It’s more difficult than it seems, and yet when we are faced with real life situations, and find ourselves frightened, vulnerable and alone, what do we long for? Nothing beats the love of God, offered by another human being.

Loving is in our human nature; the power of love is beautifully illustrated in the story of Christmas 1914 at the front lines of WWI. In the week leading up to Christmas that year,

brave soldiers peeked their heads out of the trenches at the possibility of a peaceful Christmas. A few of them met in the snowy, blood speckled no man’s land to negotiate a cease-fire for the holiday.

Depending on where they were along the front lines, they agreed to stop fighting long enough to tend to their wounded and bury their dead. In some places they went as far as sharing food and cigarettes, and some little mementos. There are records of soldiers from different sides of the war playing football together and visiting each other’s trenches to see how the others were getting on. In the film *Joyeux Noel*, a dramatization of this historical event, they have a Catholic Latin mass together in the dark and snow on Christmas eve – the language of the mass transcends the language of their countries and the conflict between them. The mass names the universal celebration of Christ’s birth, the one who comes to earth, the word of God made flesh, to teach us how to love. We are created in God’s image and loving is our nature. After the cease-fire, the soldiers

couldn't manage to fight each other. They had to be transferred and replaced on the front lines by people who hadn't shared a meal with their enemy. At Christmas time the next year there was a bit of a cease-fire in places, but the officers on up the chain of command gave strict orders to maintain the fighting. It's easier to fight people we've objectified as the enemy.

Regardless of our theology of war or how our nations respond the complexity of international relationships, in everything we do we have a choice to engage a situation with love or fear. It's much easier to respond in love when we are not afraid, when we are not hurt, when we are not grieving; but the power of love is feeling all those things and doing it anyway. When I read the text earlier this week instead of reading command, I read "this is my demand, that you love one another." I wonder if sometimes God intends to communicate "demand"; we often don't hesitate to protect ourselves . . . perhaps from time to time we need God to remind us of the power of love by insisting we practice it. While self-protection

helps us feel safe, at least in my body, it feels a bit empty and lonely; on the other hand, when I'm brave enough to love, I feel full, connected and joyful . . . what about you? Jesus invites us to cultivate that love, abide in it and lean on it during times of unrest and conflict; the love of God will continue to knock on our doors and make a home in us, so that we are able to offer love always, even in places where that seems impossible.