

# Love Actually<sup>1</sup>

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 –Luke :39-45 & 2:1-7)

I don't know how many times reruns of 'Love Actually' have been shown already this year, I know I have seen part of it a few weeks ago. Now I am not going to offer a critique of the film – you can do that yourself. One of the lines used by the Prime Minister in the film is *"If you look for it, I've got a sneaky feeling you'll find that love actually is all around."*

If you look for it, I have a sneaky feeling you'll find love actually is all around, in the Christmas story.

Today is the fourth Sunday in Advent and we have earlier lit the candle symbolising Love.

The love I see in the Christmas story isn't the kind of sickly sentimental love we find in films like Love Actually. Take a walk through the story with me and let me show you what I mean.

At the very beginning we have an angel appearing to a young girl in the little town of Nazareth. Now this experience doesn't look like love, it must have been frightening for the young girl. Shocking even, perhaps she thought she was hallucinating or at the very least dreaming. Then the angel speaks words of love to her. The angel tells her that she is favoured, she is loved by God and that God has quite an interesting time ahead for her. The child she will have and care for will be the one to bring peace and freedom to the people.

Mary soon learns that her much older cousin is also about to have a child, at exactly the same time Mary learns she too will have a child, just as the angel had said. Mary takes off up to the hills to visit and stay with her cousin. We don't really know why Mary goes there. Does she go to be of assistance to her older cousin or does she go to avoid the gossip about her own situation? Mary a young girl of maybe 12 years old finds herself unmarried and pregnant – this potentially meant being stoned to death. Maybe Elizabeth and her husband provide a place of safety for Mary. These cousins have a mutual love and care for each other, looking out for one another in their confinement during two difficult pregnancies.

When Mary returns to Nazareth she needs to have a difficult conversation with Joseph. She was promised to him in marriage, but news of her pregnancy and the fact that Joseph was not the father had put Joseph in a tricky situation. It would have been understandable if Joseph had been outraged, and done what the law allowed him to do – rid himself of this problem and the shame it brought on his family. But no, he is a man of compassion and clearly loves Mary, so he chooses to stand by her. Courageous and compassionate love.

Then another twist – they must travel to another town, his ancestral home in Bethlehem because the occupiers of the land wanted to conduct a census. Joseph again does all he can to help Mary know she is loved and cared for. Offering as much support as he can they journey to Bethlehem, protecting her as best he can from gossip, gently looking after her as gets close to giving birth, ensuring they can find somewhere to stay, even in

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<sup>1</sup> Film, Love Actually, 2003

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the midst of chaos in Bethlehem. Letting her lean on him, reassuring her, rubbing her back as the contractions start, taking on the role of father for this child. Supportive love.

And there would have been many acts of neighbourly love they encountered on the way. Perhaps sharing advice about the upcoming birth, or helping carry the load, sharing food. Upon arrival another act of neighbourly love – an innkeeper seeing a need, and doing what he could to make life a bit easier.

So, if you look you will see love permeating this entire story that is fundamental to our faith. Love that is risky. Love that is transformative. Love that is compassionate. Love that journeys with another. Love that is courageous. Love that is supportive. Love that puts another before yourself.

Ultimately the story is about God's love for the world. Love that takes on the form of our frail and vulnerable humanity. Love that shows us a new way to live. Love that forgives. Love that bring us peace and freedom. Love that cares for the poor and marginalized. Love that is expansive and reaches all no matter their gender, their ethnicity, their religious beliefs, their social standing, their age, their family background, the mistakes made, their understanding or their doubts.

All of this is the love we see in the face a tiny child born to a unmarried teenage mum in a room out the back and sleeping in the cattle feeding trough. This is how God reveals to the world that we are loved.

This is the love we must live, love that risks all, love that cares for all, love that forgives, love that includes, love that frees, love that supports in the time of need, love that takes courage, love that shocks, love that may even frighten, love that transforms and love that is the only way for the world to live in peace. Love that casts out all fear. Love that comes to us all in surprising ways.

Love, actually is all around, if you look for it. Amen.