

Love One Another
Rev. Michael Blackwood
The United Church of Broomfield
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From Jesus in 1 John 13:34, "I give you a new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you."

From the Buddha – "Out of the abundance of your heart, cultivate love and compassion for all beings."

From Lao-Chu in The Tao-Ta-Jing, "Nothing but good comes to him who loves others as he loves himself."

From the Hindu God, Krishna, in the Bah-Gah-Vad-Geee-Tah, "Seeing Me in all living creatures, know that love for all others is love for me."

From the Prophet Nephi, in 2 Nephi 31:20 in the Book of Mormon, "Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all..."

From the Prophet Muhammed, Peace Be Upon Him, in the Quran 3:31, "If you have been loving God, then follow me and God will love you and forgive your impieties. God is forgiving, Compassionate."

When talking about love, it's natural to refer to the Greeks, for the Greeks spelled it out in great detail, having given a lot of attention and thought to it. Their great details point to the complexity of love. According to the Greeks, there are seven different types of love and I'm confident that you've heard these names and definitely know these "types of love";

- 1) Eros – "body love" – lust, desire, erotica, infatuation, sex ... this is the Valentine's Day love we're bombarded with - cupid shooting arrows, feeling butterflies in your stomach or losing all of your words when someone is near.
- 2) Philia – "brotherly love" – a platonic love one has for close friends
- 3) Ludus – "playful love" - some say this is a subset of Eros or Philia – it's a love that is playful, teasing and fun. Imagine two people who enjoy "having fun together" without the bonds of Eros or Philia...
- 4) Pragma – "pragmatic / longstanding love" – love that develops over a long time. The love spouses have for each other. When I worked in the hospital, I once heard an elderly man say about his wife, "we love each other because we've been together so long and been through so much, no one could ever love me like she does."

- 5) Agape – “selfless love” – this is the love often spoken about in the church and by the church – it’s the love FOR humanity. An almost unconditional love, in which you love without expectation anything in return. It’s compassion and empathy.
- 6) Philautia – “self love” – this is a love that takes and doesn’t return. Initially, this sounds bad, but this type of love is necessary for all relationships and can be good or bad. It’s good in the circumstances of self-esteem --- you need to love yourself in order to love others. BUT...it can be bad if you love yourself too much – like a narcissist.
- 7) Storge – “familial love” – this is the love between a parent and a child or between a pet and their owner. It’s a love that “just is,” because it “just is.” You love your parent or child or dog simply because they’re connected to you – you can’t help it.

Valentine’s Day has never really been my holiday or at least not one that I care to celebrate with much effort. It’s an explosion of pink and red hues; candies, cakes and even pizzas are in the shape of hearts; increased purchases of roses, jewelry, teddy bears and gifts, gifts, gifts; and fancy dinners at 4-5 star restaurants.

Fortunately, Adam feels the same way that I do about Valentine’s Day, but I’ve had past relationships in which it was expected that I prove my love - on that day – with grandiose demonstrations or else it meant that I didn’t really love them. For so many people, “proving” one’s love on Valentine’s Day, usually involves lots of money, gifts and intricate planning. Now, I’m not advocating that we do away with the holiday or that those who celebrate are foolish. I mean, I wasn’t stupid in my past relationships, so I did what I need to do. BUT....

I wish that the passion, zeal and efforts that so many people exert in celebrating “Valentine’s Love,” were applied to God’s Love, every day of the year. Just imagine what the world would be like, if we celebrated agape love, pragma love or philia love with the same intensity and commitment that we celebrated Eros/Valentine’s Day love?

Imagine seeing a homeless person on the corner with a sign asking for money, limping from car to car for coins – you feel so compassionate for them that you don’t just give them a dollar, but you give them \$50 in cash and offer to take them to a doctor to address whatever ails them.

Imagine a single parent with two-kids, working two jobs and struggling to make ends meet walks out of FISH with a cart full of groceries. You feel so moved that as they’re heading to their car, you stop them to give them a bouquet of flowers and offer to pay a month’s rent for them.

Seems extravagant right? Any more extravagant than a \$400 dinner for two? Than a \$800 diamond ring? Than a \$150 dozen of roses that will die in a week?

But those are strangers...not my wife, my kid, my father or my friend, it’s different. You’re right, it is different – I get it.

But Jesus teaches that we're all brothers and sisters – children of God. Love one another as I have loved you (John 13:34) – extravagantly and sacrificially.

Throughout the Bible, we can find dozens upon dozens of references to love in its various forms;

“Love is patient, love is kind...” (1 Cor 13)

“For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16)

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13)

“Love does no wrong to a neighbor...” (Rom 13:10)

“...love covers all offenses” (Prov 10:12)

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.” (Song of Songs 8:7)

“How much better is your love than wine...” (Song of Songs 4:10)

In fact, we can find love in all of the world’s sacred texts and beliefs. Regardless of one’s faith, or even lack of faith, LOVE is who and what we are as a species.

We’re all familiar with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, right? According to his model, Eros Love (sex) is a primary need only for the purpose of survival of the species. But all the other forms of love (friendship, intimacy, family, a sense of connection, self-esteem) become a necessary if we hope to achieve self-actualization, i.e. to become as human as humanly possible.

In Confucianism there is an ideal of achieving Jen (*wren*), which is described as human-heartedness, love and goodness, becoming more fully human; that which gives human beings their humanity.¹

Hinduism teaches that love is a sacrament. It preaches that one gives up selfishness in love and who we really are goes well beyond our current form as a human being; we are spiritual beings, having a human experience. In the sacred text named Kanda Guru Kavasa, it says, “...For the thing which is everywhere is only Love, And Love is the only thing which is like a soul within us...Love is God.”²

According to Hannah Timson, President of Humanist Students, an atheist organization in the United Kingdom, while she doesn’t adhere to the idea of God or a creator, she believes in a human connection “from one person to another, not to deny our human nature, but to embrace it and celebrate.... those who are ‘other’ to yourself...”³ Humans innately seek to love and make creation better.

¹ <https://philosophy.lander.edu/oriental/main.html>

² <http://www.skandagurunatha.org/works/skanda-guru-kavasam/skanda-guru-kavasam.pdf>

³ <https://humanism.org.uk/2018/05/21/humanism-love-purpose-and-responsibility>

In the Christian, Bahai', Judaism and Islam faiths, to name a few, it is expressly taught that humans were created as an act of love. Love is innate in us, whether we like it or not. We can't help but to love, to empathize and to care. Certainly, we struggle with love, but again that is just a reflection of the complexity of love and of us. Humans are complex and complicated...just like love. God is love...we are love.

How many of you are familiar with a show on Netflix called *Stranger Things*? If you've not seen it, you've probably heard of it. It's a sci-fi horror show set in early 1980s Hawkins, Indiana, home to the Hawkins National Laboratory, which performs scientific research for the US Dept. of Energy, but also engages in secret research and experiments into the supernatural and the paranormal. As a result of their experiments, the lab inadvertently creates a portal to an alternate dimension. You can imagine the chaos that that creates and the foundation for the series.

The series began with the disappearance of a young boy named Will, amid supernatural events that began to occur around the town. Will's family and friends are pivotal characters in the series, along with the local police chief, Hopper, and a young girl with psychokinetic powers named, Elle, who escaped the research lab and becomes part of the ragtag group of adolescent teens. Seasons one and two involve these characters discovering, investigating and engaging the secrets, supernatural creatures and phenomena of Hawkins and its lab.

Fast forward to the third season of the show which aired last year. Hopefully you've watched it because I'm going to share info that will spoil it, if you haven't. In the third season, a new iteration of monstrous, evil creature has escaped from the alternate dimension and takes possession of an angry, bully, lifeguard named Billy, using him to do its bidding. Billy lures residents of the town to the monster's lair and then the monster more-or-less "consumes" the victim, taking over their mind, while leaving their body intact. The victims then continue on with their lives as normal, with no one knowing the wiser. Will, his teen-ager friends and a few astute adults learn of this new creature, its possession of Billy and an apparent plot to take over the town and set out to defeat it.

Elle, the girl with the psychokinetic powers, has the ability to see beyond her current position in time and space. While sitting blindfolded and focusing intently, she can "see" where people are and hear what's happening. With this power, she searches for Billy to find him and possibly the monster. She locates him and to her surprise, besides seeing and hearing where he is, she "experiences" his memories. She sees a young Billy, maybe 7 years old - a happy moment on the beach with his mother --- then an angry memory, a baseball game with his drunk, abusive father berating him --- a memory of Billy on the phone with his Mom, crying "when will you come back?" She then sees the monster, it's location, how it took possession of Billy and Billy luring others to the creature.

In the final episode of the season, we have the climax. The kids are doing all they can to fight off the evil monster. It's the battle between good and evil. The kids are fighting valiantly but struggling to fend off the creature. The possessed Billy captures a hurt and weakened Elle and presents her before the evil monster, another sacrifice, but a better one, because Elle has supernatural powers. Elle screams and tries to fight against Billy, but he holds on. Elle then begins to cry. She looks into Billy's eyes and says, "I saw you and your Mom on the beach." He suddenly stops and stares at her. "I saw you running in the water. There were seagulls. She was wearing a white sundress with a blue and red heart. You were laughing. She was laughing. You were happy."

Suddenly the monster extends a tentacle to consume Elle, but before it can reach her, Billy grabs the tentacle. Free now, Elle slowly starts pushing herself away from the monster and Billy. The tentacle strains toward Elle, but Billy holds it back. Then another tentacle appears and attaches itself to Billy's right side. Another appears – his left side. Another and another – finally a tentacle attaches to Billy's chest – it kills Billy.

It's no surprise I'm sure that by the end of the episode good wins and evil loses – this monster is killed (for now....there will be a season 4, after all).

Elle was able to reach the goodness and love innately within Billy. Despite the anger inside Billy and despite the evil monster that possessed him, love was still inside him and it couldn't be destroyed. Billy just needed to be reminded of his Godly humanness, called Love.

Knowing that we are love, nothing should get in our way of loving each other, even religion and faith. So why does it? If we are love...if we are innately loving and compassionate toward others, then why does it seem that Valentine's Day can so easily encourage us to spend enormous amounts of money "for love," but our belief in God or our belief in humanity isn't enough for us to simply offer basic human love and compassion for others? What is it that gets in the way of us loving those *...that may not look like us, or think like us, or behave like us, or earn as much as us?*

It's because love, like humans made in the image of God, is complex and often times mysterious. We know we are loved. We experience love. We witness love. But sometimes, it's hard to demonstrate love...without a bit of encouragement. Valentine's Day is great if for no other reason than it encourages us...it reminds us to show love and do it well. Hopefully, to also do it selflessly and with sincerity.

In the words of the letter known as 1st John to members of the early church who were struggling and in need a bit of encouragement...

7-8 Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. The person who doesn't love doesn't know God, because God is love.

9-10 This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent her only Son into the world so that we can live through him. This is love; it is not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent her Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins.

11-12 Dear friends, if God loved us so sacrificially, surely we should love one another (in such a way). No one has ever seen God with human eyes, but if we love one another, God truly lives in us. Consequently, God's love has accomplished its mission among us.

13-14 This is how we know we remain in God and God remains in us, because God has given us a measure of his Spirit. We have seen and testify that God has sent the Son to be the savior of the world.

16-17 We have known and have believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them. This love is fulfilled with us, so that on the day of judgment we have confidence based on our identification with Jesus in this world.

18-19 There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. The person who is afraid has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love because God first loved us.

20-21 If someone claims, "I love God," but hates his brother or sister, then he is a liar. Anyone who does not love a brother or sister, whom he has seen, cannot possibly love God, whom he has never seen. He gave us a clear command, that all who love God must also love their brothers and sisters.

In the name...

Of Abraham and Moses

Of the prophet Muhammed, peace be upon Him

Of Buddha

Of Krishna

Of Jesus Christ

God - let us love one another. AMEN