

LOVE  
United Church of Broomfield  
February 14, 2021  
Transfiguration Sunday  
*and Valentine's Day...*

Scripture Readings:

- **From the Buddha's sermon at Fajagaha, verses 19-22**

"Do not deceive, do not despise each other anywhere. Do not be angry nor bear secret resentments; for as a mother will risk her life and watches over her child, so boundless be your love to all, so tender, kind and mild."

- **A Druidic Vow**

"We swear by peace and love to stand  
Heart to heart, and hand in hand.  
Mark, O Spirit, and hear us now,  
Confirming this our Sacred Vow."

- **From the Hindu Scriptures; selected verses from The Brihadaranyaka [BREE-HADA-RAN-YAKA] Upanishad**

[A spouse loves their significant other not for their own sake, dear one, but because the Divine Beloved lives in them.] Children are loved not for their own sake, dear one, but because the Divine Beloved lives in them... All things are loved not for their own sake, but because the Divine Beloved lives in them.

- **From Hinduism's Bhagavad Gita, 18.55**

To love is to know Me, My innermost nature, the truth that I am.

- **From Christian monks who lived and worked in China starting in the 6th century in The Lost Sutras of Jesus**

"Love leads to truth; perfect love to perfect truth.  
Truth is like the moon reflected in the water;  
when the water is stirred up and muddy,  
the image is blurred and indistinct,  
so it is with human beings when our spirit is clouded.  
Let your love be a pure compassion for one another,  
without seeking its own glory,  
let it be true in your own hearts.  
Let your spirits guide you  
to what is right and true and just.  
This is the way love leads us."

- **From Islam's Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi 13**

Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.

- **From the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13)**

"GOD IS LOVE.

May you have His kind of love for each other.

LOVE IS PATIENT AND KIND.

May you be able to lovingly overlook each other's faults and weaknesses.

LOVE IS NOT JEALOUS OR BOASTFUL.

May you seek praise for each other and not for yourselves.

LOVE IS NOT ARROGANT OR RUDE.

May you give of yourselves for each other's needs and treat one another with utmost respect.

LOVE DOES NOT INSIST ON ITS OWN WAY.

May you genuinely listen to each other with a willingness to be wrong yourselves.

LOVE IS NOT IRRITABLE OR RESENTFUL.

May you be tolerant of each other's moods, always ready to forgive, never holding a grudge.

LOVE DOES NOT REJOICE AT WRONG

BUT REJOICES IN THE RIGHT.

May you experience happiness because of each other's triumphs and successes.

LOVE BEARS ALL THINGS.

May you seek to understand each other's differences, knowing you will stick together through it all.

LOVE HOPES ALL THINGS.

May you always expect the best in each situation, regardless of temporary setbacks.

LOVE ENDURES ALL THINGS.

May you never give up your commitment to work on improving your relationship.

LOVE NEVER ENDS.

May you spend the rest of your lives together enjoying God's love.

GOD IS LOVE."

- **From Jesus Christ in the gospel of John 15:9-13**

"As [God] has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept [God's] commandments and abide in [God's] love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

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Love is a part of life – while true, that's far too simple and incomplete of a statement. If we look at sacred texts from all faiths on this planet and even profane, non-sacred texts, we see that LIFE is LOVE and LOVE is LIFE. So why is love so hard? And why do we get it wrong...if it's so simple and easy....and basic to life?

We in the church often seem to do love wrong. We can start by saying that perhaps we consider love the easy part of our faith. When Paul tells us that love summarizes the law, we let out a sigh of relief, thinking that we can dump all that annoying legalism and just love. When Jesus elevates love of God and neighbor to the highest commandment, we just assume he has made our ethical lives simple. We can handle loving one another. I challenge any of you to find me someone who wouldn't say, "I'm a loving person."

If we look at ourselves honestly, however, we see the problems that pop up. There are times when we define love too sentimentally. We can think we show love when we cuddle a baby, take a covered dish to the reception after a funeral or give someone roses and candies in a heart-shaped box. We can show great love to our family and friends in the church and think that we have fulfilled Jesus' call to love. We can pat ourselves on the back because we think we understand true religion and faith when we see them. Showing our faith in Christ just means practicing love, right?

When we try to push things deeper, we begin to see how our assumptions fall apart. Even just within the church, we sometimes find showing love harder than we assumed. We fight with our family and friends, finding reconciliation more painful than we wish. We disagree about worship, interpretation of scripture or about even raising the budget, and our easy satisfactions about love just fly out the window. I mean, who can expect us to love people when they think wrong?

If we find love difficult to practice, we might notice that the church has always had problems with love. Throughout its history, the church has put more energy into arguing doctrine than practicing love. No one should say that doctrine doesn't matter. Yet the New Testament writers put much effort into convincing us to love one another. Paul wrote the beautiful words in 1 Corinthians 13 that we almost always read at weddings, but which apply much more broadly. John exhorts us so often to love that we almost want to assure him that we get it. Could we actually assume that we should place at least as much importance on love as we do on doctrine?

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Sacred texts, all of them, speak of Love, in all of its varied forms. For us Christians, if the New Testament talks so much about love, what do we learn when we read it? Many Christians know that Greek has more than one word for love. Drawing from classical Greek, the New Testament writers understood that love has many components. They understood the complexity of love. In some cases, we choose to love, and by making that choice, we put away other things. Love makes a commitment and looks past flaws to hold onto that commitment. In contrast, romantic love can intoxicate us....and make us spend \$150 on \$20 roses.

In English, we do not have the many different words for love. In English, we place adjectives in front of "love" to help make distinctions. When we talk about the kind of love that Christians show for one another, we might make a distinction between mutual love and obedient love. We might say that part of our problem in the church arises because we do not understand the distinction.

Mutual love might refer to the love we have for people who treat us well and show us love in return. We may sometimes have some problems showing that kind of love, but we usually find it easy and satisfying.

Obedient love, however, refers to the love we show each other because Jesus commanded us to love. Obedient love may not flow up easily from within us. In showing obedient love, we love those we find hard to feel warm about, even some who disagree with us. We love those who don't love us back, or don't love us in the way we want.

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When we look at the last love scripture read today from the Gospel of John, Jesus calls for something like what we have described as obedient love. This love flows from God through Jesus to us. God's love both inspires our love and enables our love. When our well dries up, we can draw on the love God has shown us. When our

teeth still hurt from the kick we received, we can draw on God's love. When we "abide" in Jesus' love, we find a supply of love we didn't know we had.

If we fall into the trap of thinking that love comes easily, or if we confuse love with sentimentality, some things about this passage burst those bubbles. The passage comes just after a word from Jesus that helps us understand the kind of love he calls for, and it comes just before another such comment. Within the passage itself, we find a word that lifts love above the kind of tender, hazy thing we often mistake it for.

Just after the passage, Jesus injects an assurance that doesn't sound sentimental at all. Jesus reminds the disciples, "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you."<sup>1</sup> All of the sentimentality about love drains out when we read that. The world showed its hatred to Jesus on the cross. The world continues to show disdain, ambivalence and even hatred toward God and faith. In many places around the globe, faithful believers in God still lose jobs, relationships, status and their lives because of their commitment to the kind of love of which Jesus taught and exemplified, in life and in death.

We in the United States do not really face persecution, not really. We live in a pluralistic society that recognizes many faiths. Here, we face not so much hatred as apathy and cynicism. Some do not take us seriously, thinking we're jaded and unrealistic and some chide us for supporting a "broken" institution called, religion. In that environment, we can show obedient love that bears fruit, that feeds the hungry and shines God's light into the world's darkness.

A few verses before this passage from John, Jesus identifies the real problem with showing love. He tells the disciples, "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming."<sup>2</sup> Jesus does not explain in depth what he means by "the ruler of this world." Other parts of the New Testament talk about demons, unclean spirits and Satan. With all of these terms, the New Testament writers tell us that we find ourselves in the midst of a spiritual battle.

In whatever way we understand these words about Satan, demons and "the ruler of this world," we can all agree that the evil in the world is tenacious. We draw back in horror at some of the things people do to each other and at some of the troubles we face. We may not quite understand how the ruler of this world works to influence what goes on in life, but we see that we act as the church in a dangerous, hostile, baffling world. When we show obedient love, we let loose a spiritual force into this hostile environment. We practice an active, powerful love that takes strength and courage to show.

Within the passage itself, we see both the last nail in the coffin of our sentimentality and a third understanding of love. Jesus laid down his life for us. Jesus went beyond mutual love and obedient love to sacrificial love. Jesus answered the hatred of the world and the influence of the ruler of this world with sacrificial love. Jesus did not glorify death or suffering, but by facing head on the evil of the world, he lost his life. His sacrifice inspires gratitude from us. We reach out in love to others, not backing down from the hatred of the world. As did Jesus, we trust in God for the resurrection.

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We face a world of hate and violence, a world where evil defies our attempts to eradicate it. Jesus came into the darkness of the world to shine the light. As Jesus prepared to leave this world, he gave these words to his disciples. He called them to love one another. We know now that showing this love does not come easily.

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<sup>1</sup> John 15:18.

<sup>2</sup> John 14:30

Nevertheless, Jesus invited us to abide in his love. His love becomes the oasis to which we can retreat when the world becomes too much for us. His love becomes the well from which we can draw when our love runs out.

If Jesus' words about love in the midst of evil and hate sound strange, the promise he makes sounds even stranger: "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." Sandwiched in between Jesus' words about evil and hate we find Jesus' promise of joy. We might find happiness in a number of things, but we find true joy only in the love of God that comes through Jesus. Only that joy lifts us up above the trouble in our lives and the trouble in the world so we can abide with God. Jesus does not promise we will receive what we want. Jesus promises us joy that comes from within.

Jesus Christ shows us a better way — a higher way — of loving. It's a way of loving that novelist and minister Frederick Buechner described in his book, *The Magnificent Defeat*:

***The love for equals is a human thing*** — of friend for friend, brother for brother. It is to love what is loving and lovely. The world smiles.

***The love for the less fortunate is a beautiful thing*** — the love for those who suffer, for those who are poor, the sick, the failures, the unlovely. This is compassion, and it touches the heart of the world.

***The love for the more fortunate is a rare thing*** — to love those who succeed where we fail, to rejoice without envy with those who rejoice, the love of the poor for the rich, of the black ... for the white .... The world is always bewildered by its saints.

***And then there is the love for the enemy*** — love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain. The tortured's love for the torturer.

This is God's love. It conquers the world.<sup>3</sup>

AMEN

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/300729-the-love-for-equals-is-a-human-thing--of-friend-for>