

Love Doesn't Make Us Stupid – It Makes Us Brave

- a sermon compiled and presented by Dawn Daniels, UUFCM Minister

Sunday, February 11, 2018

-To persevere in loving the world...

Sermon Prelude

“Love Is the Water” – Brother Sun

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BBbqLS87do>

Sermon Reflection

Our worship services for the month of February are all centered around aspects of the question “What does it mean to be a people of perseverance?” In reflecting on that question, I have noted a pattern of perseverance in my own life and living and in my ministry that surfaces often but most especially with the approach of the celebration of Valentine’s Day. My perseverance – my persistence – has to do with one of the most used, mis-used, abused conceptual words ever devised by us “human merely beings” – love. Possibly **only the word “God”** rises to the same level of capacity for grief and difficulty for us. And because I believe not only that what we *do* matters but also what we *say* matters – particularly since the heart of our mission here is to be a “religious community, guided by love...” – I would like this morning to spend some time in reclamation and reframing what this means and how it is that we might better persevere in loving ourselves, each other, and this blessed world.

My perseverance in wanting to deepen our understanding about what love means, to rescue it from the shallow confines of our cultural consumerism and shallow romanticism, was first seeded for me back in 2004 during the desolation of personal and familial heartbreak – the heartbreak of separation and ultimately divorce from my once-upon-a-time husband of seventeen (17) years. It was during that time that I came to the painful awareness of the devastation that can be wrought if a person persists in the belief that love is just a feeling and if that feeling ever abates, then love no longer exists. One thing I remember saying often during that period of desperate struggle to save my marriage was “Love is a choice, not just a feeling. Love takes work.” Though in truth, more often than not I was shouting through angry tears, “Love is a choice, dammit!”

I have since learned that I was not at all alone in my assertion, though other wise folk managed to share their sentiments without cursing. C.S. Lewis once wrote that "Love is not affectionate feeling,

but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained." And the divine Mr. Rogers said that **"Love isn't a state of perfect caring. It's an active noun like struggle. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now."**

It is only now in hindsight, standing beyond the emotional turbulence of that devastating time, that I can see the **ethic of love** that was seeded during the years of my marriage and was subsequently forced into fruition when it ended. I can honestly say if it had not been for the heartbreak of that loss and the lessons learned during that time, I am not wholly sure I would be standing here today...doing this work. My vulnerability lead me beyond myself...

"We could count the ways – of love, that is, as literary minster Karen Hering suggests. Poets have done it; philosophers and theologians too. [...] We could categorize it and define it – ask ourselves where does eros end and agape begin? What separates the love of attraction and desire from divinely rooted, selfless love? Where does philia, the love found in friendship, enter in? But love's place, especially in religious life and community, is perhaps less about the names and types of love than it is about the **practice of loving**. How might we choose to love or live with an ethic of love? **"We would all love better," claims writer bell hooks, "if we used it as a verb."** Unfortunately, love, like so much else, has been largely privatized by our consumer culture. With almost surgical precision and with dire results, we often sever the love exchanged between two people from the larger love that naturally grows from healthy, intimate relationships. But love is not meant to be segregated. **Love itself is a leaning toward wholeness, a longing to return to our original connectedness and oneness, as if recalling to our awareness the shared stardust of which we are all made.** This is no fuzzy New Age proposition. In recent decades, scientists researching the human brain have found that love is not merely some heartfelt counterbalance to the heady seat of our cherished reason. It is, in fact, hardwired into the human brain itself. Our natural connection to one another – our physical and emotional interdependence – has evolved within the human limbic brain as a necessity of survival. An ethic of love is the natural fruit of loving in personal relationships. Made vulnerable by our softening toward our beloved, we open ourselves wider to the world around us; and the eye of our imagination, now awakened, begins to see beneath the surface of things. **We come, in an act of choice and will and assisted by grace and faith, to decipher the "hidden wholeness" joining us all.** It is a beckoning that neither denies nor obliterates our uniqueness; but it does require that we look beneath our differences and humbly receive the gift of a larger union. Who would suspect that the pleasant inner glow

felt with love's first glimmer could lead to something as powerful – and radical – as this? As Emerson notes, we mostly venture into love's terrain wholly unaware that it might open a new relationship with all of humanity; but the trajectory is strong. "In the procession of the soul from within outward," he writes, "it enlarges its circles ever, like the pebble thrown into the pond, or the light proceeding from an orb." To be sure, we have developed many ways to avoid love's call into larger unity, and this has been at great cost, individually and collectively. "There is life without love," writes Mary Oliver. "It is not worth a bent penny, or a scuffed shoe. It is not worth the body of a dead dog nine days unburied." **The work of religion might be described as claiming life's larger worth by inspiring and equipping us to choose and practice love anyway.** Despite our fear of loss. Despite our culture's messages that love is desirable but fleeting, personal but not political, attractive but impractical. Despite the forces that would have us believe we can have love in our lives without challenging the lovelessness of oppression in the world. We are called, in the name of love, to imagine and remember the larger wholeness in which we all belong and, in so doing, to recover our wholeness within.

(<http://www.unityunitarian.org/uploads/6/1/0/3/6103699/february2010.pdf>, excerpted)

In closing, I wish to share a bit of wisdom from meditation teacher and author Sharon Salzberg - an excerpt from her May 2017 column published for the Public Theology Reimagined component of the *On Being* website:

<https://onbeing.org/blog/sharon-salzberg-love-doesnt-make-us-stupid-it-makes-us-brave/>

She writes:

...We can move away from anxious identification with love as submissiveness or giving in. **We don't have to limit our notion of love to romance.** We can challenge our conditioning that tells us that loving someone also mandates our liking them and wanting to spend time with them. We can remember that, as the Buddha taught, love is the antidote to fear, not the countervailing force to wisdom. **Love doesn't make us stupid; it makes us brave.**

Love doesn't mean we approve of someone, or that we will cease to disagree or to fight. It means that we recognize that, like it or not, we live in an interconnected universe, that our lives have something to do with one another. It means that the more severed we feel from the whole, the more we suffer and the more we are willing to cause suffering. If we study life, if we look at our own deepest experience, **we see love as a power rather than a compromised sentimentality.** We see that love instead of hatred can fuel our actions as we work to both

provoke and embody the change we seek for our communities and for the world. This is what I am calling real love.

If we look at the world today we see that this does indeed look like a world that could use some love. If we believe in the possibility of love and the power of love and the availability of love, then it becomes up to each one of us to make it real.

Writer Jason Garner recently offered me an inspiring way of thinking about lovingkindness for all beings. “At times it can seem glib, naïve, or perhaps even stupid to talk about loving all beings,” he said.

“When we look around our world, with wars, terrorist attacks, people killing each other over race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation...**how can we possibly hold a space for loving everyone?** But this is, in fact, exactly why we must.”

In other words, it often seems like the conditions of our world push us toward cynicism, as if our regard for others is something beyond our control. But just as we can practice resisting our habits of self-judgment with lovingkindness, **we can meet the hate we see in our world with love.** And, in fact, we have to.

That’s the crux of Jason’s argument for radical love:

“We’re called to practice a love that is more courageous than all the terror we see in our world, because if we aren’t bold in our love then the hate wins out... So we love one another even when it’s seemingly impossible; we look for the humanity behind the acts of hatred; we find our own pain in the pain of the world; and we meet it all with an intensity of love that is fitting of our intense times.”

May it ever be so. Blessed be. Amen.

Closing Words

“The Long Haul” - prttybrd; Susan Osborn singer/songwriter

I promise to love you through it all.

Through all the pain and distance

Through the emptiness and fear

Through the nothing that feels like everything

And through the everything that feels like love

I will love you

I'm making my shoulders strong for the young to stand upon,

stepping lightly on the backs of those

who hold me up.

It's a chain of life unending,

ever new and ever bending,