

2/13/11 Sermon

“Valentine’s Day – Eyes Wide Shut or Open”

Rev. Paul D. Daniel, Minister

Valentine’s Day calls us to recall love in its many forms – from agape, unselfish love for another; to love of our children and family; to erotic, passionate, intimate love; from childhood fantasies to teenage angst; to young love and love of the ages that the poets write about and minstrels sing. It is a musing that brings peace to our hearts and trouble to our souls. It is universal and personal.

Oh, do I know. Like many in the world, I sleep alone in my bed; my cat a constant companion looking upside down into my eyes ... purring. She knows not that I seek a love beyond hers; or I sit quietly on my sofa watching a sitcom and burst into tears, longing for companionship that seems to elude not just me but many of you, too.

Most of my time counseling congregants is helping them decide if what they give and receive in love is actually meeting their needs. I am moved by their longing for intimacy and connection, and saddened when it disappoints or eludes them. Perhaps now is a time to examine how you experience love. At times, some of us find it easier to connect, no matter how briefly, with someone who will share sex for a moment of love and physical pleasure than to find another beating heart beyond a pulsing body. There is an old expression that rings true for both men and women. Life tells us that women use sex to get love and men use love to get sex. Sad, but often true. So what do we do amidst this conundrum? Do we go back to the internet to numb our pain or go within to heighten that pain that forces us to confront our own needs, shortcomings and desires, and to ultimately heal?

Perhaps you are among those that pray for clarity to more clearly hear your own inner voice of love, the God within, call it what you will. Oh, spirit of love, we implore you to give us the answers that can heal our wounded heart that shouts out there – “Get the girl (or boy)!” – can never provide. Listen to the soft whisper in our souls! As William Fisher writes, “It speaks of love and says I can be whole. That gentle voice divulges I am filled with power, and confides that I may consult it any hour. When it comes to listening, I know I make the choice. But now I know that whisper is God’s own voice, (my own voice and I am glad).” This is the Universalist God of Hope – our Universalist God of Hope – that offers us an overwhelming confidence that we are worthy of love – a love that is a living, joyous and creative entity. This is our God that embraces us in eternal love.

No matter the pain we have at the loss or lack of love, no one is doomed forever to be without comfort and companionship, for we always have the spirit that animates our existence and the breath of life of our inner selves. For Universalists, our salvation is ours without asking – that is the promise of our faith. We believe love will forever triumph over emptiness and loss. True love does not come to those who sit and wait for it. Bodily pleasure can be a cheap fix for our cravings, for the longing and emptiness we feel. But real love is demanding and requires much vulnerability. We can choose to take the easy way and, like Chinese food, be hungry again in an hour; or we can feast at banquet of love and be satisfied for a lifetime.

Real love is an equal blend of giving and receiving, fantasy and reality, compassion and truth telling and, oh, so much more. Love, in its truest nature allows the intimacy of sex to be sublime. It is bodily and spiritual and embracing a longing and hunger for touch beyond hands and lips; a reaching for ecstasy and spiritual fulfillment with and through another. If you yearn for this experience, engaging in the pain of confronting your demons, needs and desires is the path to ultimately open yourself to the healing holy in all of our lives.

Nancy Rose Meaker expressed it this way:

I hunger to engage!

Your eyes, your mouth, your thought!

In intercourse of word or flesh, I know you, and to you am known.

Come be with me in dappled sunlight, languorous in laughter shared.

O, come explore delicious realms and let our sacred touch go deep.

I dance the earth and sky ecstatic, bodies singing, rhythms hot!

Your pleased smile is holy wine, eyes closed, breath caught.

The moment is our crucible, luminous with reverent flame

Creative juices, honey-sweet, go incandescent, raised to heaven, offered in your name.

It is you and you alone who can define what love is and what you want from it. There is a hierarchy of essential needs in a loving relationship. Trust and fidelity at the top of the pyramid. Each partner in a relationship must be able to have confidence that the other is faithful to both the intent and the letter of a commitment. Remember, we make ourselves vulnerable to deep hurt when we open our hearts to another and offer our bodies to deep intimacy. That openness must be treated with sacred intent by our partners. Without fidelity, the safety and trust one feels with another is broken and, like Humpty Dumpty, cannot be put back together again.

It is widely acknowledged that both men and women cheat in alarming numbers; but infidelity is not just limited to physical acts between people,

when we have individuals who use the internet to replace personal connection, also leading to alienation of affections and betrayal. Sex can become a quick fix for their cravings to banish the emptiness they might feel. It is easy to reason that a warm body is better than a cold bed. Men perhaps have an easier time in separating sex and love though all who stray seem to compartmentalize their lives to cope with their lies and deceit. Not being fully present in a relationship makes a sham of a commitment. We cannot hide behind our roles as partner, parent, lover or bread winner and think that is enough. We owe our partners all of us; our experiences and life lessons, our upbringing and yearning for something more.

There need to be three elements in every relationships, no exceptions. There must be two fully present individuals and then the embodiment of that union called a couple. Our partners have an absolute right to integrity, to our authentic selves. Secrets and holding back kills love a lie at a time. Like many people who struggle to be real with themselves and others who live behind closed doors as I did before I came out as a gay man, I was quite familiar with that dynamic.

It is not just love and trust that is destroyed if we participate in infidelity – it is also our sense of self worth and friendship; for our partners must be the one we like best being with and sharing life's adventures, its deep sorrow and giddy joys. This is the one person that embodies all our realistic hopes and aspirations for a happy life. Fantasy love and sex partners are just those – fantasies. Being true to ourselves and our relationships, calls us to learn to accept our partners for who they are and not try to remake them, to mold them into some ideal. A true partner allows the other to grow and change over time within their loving union; for that is what love is also.

There is so much more to love than any one person can define across a lifetime. For love should offer a spiritual connection to the holy and sacred other and be congruent with your personal experience. Love has in its truest nature a resonance with the great, poets, philosophers and theologians who serve to put these experiences into context and harmonize with the beating of your heart. We should ache when we lack a trusted friend, someone to share our deepest and darkest in safety. We should know and radiate comfort and joy when we have true love reciprocated from another. My heart wants this kind of love for all of you. Remember, where there is love, there is hope for our needs to be satisfied, but you must be willing to answer the call of love.