

Theodore Parker Church

Yes. Love Wins.

Sunday, February 14, 2021

OPENING WORDS

Love is as love does. Love is an act of will - namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love.” (M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*)

This morning, instead of our more typical order of service, we are sharing a number of stories - stories that help us remember the different ways that love comes into our lives, or informs our living. So often we imagine love - and particularly the love we celebrate on Valentine’s Day - to be a romantic expression. We send flowers, or cards - mostly heartfelt references to our sweeties, but also some to family and friends. But the history of Valentine’s Day is much more varied - from the early fertility festivals (which, by today’s standards, were pretty gruesome) to martyred priests, etc. It has only recently become the second most prolific day of card exchange in the United States.

Still, today, we want to pay tribute to what love can be, how it can sustain us and give us hope, how - at the end of the day - love wins. We’ll share three stories from very different origins: one from the poet, Pablo Neruda; one from the writer, Eduardo Galeano [Gal-e-ano]; and one from then Unitarian Universalist minister-in-training, the Rev. Gretchen Haley. And in between, we will hear the gift of Howard Skempton’s music from Yukiko, as we share the things and people that we, at Theodore Parker Church, love so much.

STORY 1 Giving My Poetry Light Pablo Neruda, Chilean poet (1904-1973)

*“Neruda became known as a poet when he was 13 years old, and wrote in a variety of styles, including **surrealist** poems, historical epics, overtly political manifestos, a prose autobiography, and passionate love poems such as the ones in his collection **Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair** (1924).”*

One time, investigating in the backyard of our house in Temuco the tiny objects and minuscule beings of my world, I came upon a hole in one of the boards of the fence. I looked through the hole and saw a landscape like that behind our house, uncared for, and wild. I moved back a few steps, because I sensed vaguely that something was about to happen. All of a sudden a hand appeared - a tiny hand of a boy about my own age. By the time I came close again, the hand was gone, and in its place there was a marvelous white sheep.

The sheep's wool was faded. Its wheels had escaped. All of this only made it more authentic. I had never seen such a wonderful sheep. I looked back through the hole, but the boy had disappeared. I went into the house and brought out a treasure of my own: a pinecone, opened, full of odor and resin, which I adored. I set it down in the same spot and went off with the sheep.

I never saw either the hand or the boy again. And I have never again seen a sheep like that either. The toy I lost finally in a fire. But even now, (at) almost fifty years old, whenever I pass a toyshop, I look furtively into the window, but it's no use. They don't make sheep like that anymore.

I have been a lucky man. To feel the intimacy of brothers is a marvelous thing in life. To feel the love of people whom we love is a fire that feeds our life. But to feel the affection that comes from those whom we do not know, from those unknown to us, who are watching over our sleep and solitude, over our dangers and our weaknesses - that is something still greater and more beautiful because it widens out the boundaries of our being, and unites all living things.

That exchange brought home to me for the first time a previous idea: that all of humanity is somehow together. That experience came to me again much later; this time it stood out strikingly against a background of trouble and persecution.

It won't surprise you then that I attempted to give something resinous, earthy, and fragrant in exchange for human brotherhood. Just as I once left the pinecone by the fence, I have since left my words on the door of so many people who were unknown to me, people in prison, or hunted, or alone.

That is the great lesson I learned in my childhood, in the backyard of a lonely house. Maybe it was nothing but a game two boys played who didn't know each other and wanted to pass to the other some good things of life. Yet maybe this small and mysterious exchange of gifts remained inside me also, deep and indestructible, giving my poetry light.

Eduardo Galeano [Gal-e-ano] was a [Uruguayan](#) journalist, writer and novelist considered, among other things, "global soccer's pre-eminent man of letters" and "a literary giant of the Latin American left" Kevin Murray will be sharing

*an essay called Celebration of the Human Voice, a reading from **The Book of Embraces.***

STORY 2 Celebration of the Human Voice Eduardo Galeano (1940-2014)

Their hands were tied or handcuffed, yet their fingers danced, flew, drew words. The prisoners were hooded, but leaning back, they could see a bit, just a bit, down below. Although it was forbidden to speak, they spoke with their hands. Pinio Ungerfeld taught me the finger alphabet, which he had learned in prison without a teacher.

“Some of us had bad handwriting,” he told me. “Others were masters of calligraphy.”

The Uruguayan dictatorship wanted everyone to stand alone, everyone to be no one: In prisons and barracks, and throughout the country, communication was a crime.

Some prisoners spent more than ten years buried in solitary cells the size of coffins, hearing nothing but clanging bars or footsteps in the corridors. Fernandez Huidobro and Mauricio Rosencof, thus condemned, survived because they could talk to each other by tapping on the wall. In that way they told of dreams and memories, fallings in and out of love; they discussed, embraced, fought; they shared beliefs and beauties, doubts and guilts, and those questions that have no answer.

When it is genuine, when it is born of the need to speak, no one can stop the human voice. When denied a mouth, it speaks with the hands or the eyes, or

the pores, or anything at all. Because every single one of us has something to say to the others, something that deserves to be celebrated or forgiven by others.

Meditation/Prayer

bell hooks shares with us the story of a time of heartbreak in her life, when she noticed on a wall near her home the graffiti words, “the search for love continues, even in the face of great odds.” And so it does, and so we do . . . keep searching for the signs of love that reach into our hearts, that ease the burdens, and make us hopeful. “The search for love continues, even in the face of great odds”

Spirit of life, of love and joy, of wisdom and compassion, be evident to us. Help us to allay the distractions that keep us from noticing the possibility of your presence in everything we do and see and feel. Remind us when we are weary to keep our hearts wide open. We are so often disappointed by what we think we need to see or have, but let our audacity not deter us from our capacity to see the myriad things that are right in front of us. Remind us to be humble, grateful, and always on the lookout for love.

Our next story comes from the Rev. Gretchen Haley, who serves the Foothills Unitarian Church in Fort Collins, Colorado. She shared the story of an internship experience in the book, To Wake, To Rise.” Suzanne Missert is going to share her essay called, Change My Heart.

STORY 3 Change my heart - Rev. Gretchen Haley Suzanne Missert

My first year in seminary, I interned as a chaplain at the Denver Women's Prison, where on Friday nights we'd gather for worship. Which, I quickly learned, meant gathering around a CD player blasting what some call "Jesus-is-my-boyfriend" music.

The music would fill the room, and the women would sing along with all their hearts, raising their arms, filled with passion, swaying together, singing *Jesus, Jesus . . .*

As for me - well, I stood in the back, my arms firmly crossed, hoping to demonstrate to all who might look my way, this was not my thing.

More than just feeling personally uncomfortable, I felt embarrassed for the women, and for all this cheesy superficial theology they had somehow embraced. And from this distanced and defended place, I watched.

So often we resist with our rational brains the experiences our hearts most crave. We talk ourselves out of the love that stands so close we could almost eat it up if we would just . . . stop. Let go. Love.

To receive love like *that* would mean an ongoing willingness to be *vulnerable*, an ongoing journey of transformation, breaking open and changing, being born and reborn again.

My stance in the back of the worship space was like my own little force field that had me *thinking* much about "systems of oppression, economic injustice, generational poverty," etc., etc., and therefore protecting me from any deeper engagement with the *life* in the room.

But then, between each worship service, the women would come and talk with me. And I started to get to know them, arms unfolded. I heard their stories - of greater loss than I could even fathom, more struggle than you'd think a single person could survive.

Then, Friday night would come again, and they'd sing. And they'd cry, and laugh together, and release from their bodies just a few of the stories I knew lived there.

One Friday night, I was standing there, and this song was playing, "Change my heart, O God. Make it ever true. Change my heart, O God, may I be like you." Suddenly, it just hit me.

I mean it hit me who should *really* be embarrassed in the room - and in case it's not clear, it wasn't the women singing and swaying. In that moment, it hit me, the words, they didn't matter. The theology - Jesus-as-my-boyfriend and Father-God-centered as it was - didn't matter. Because the room was filled with *life*, and there was just one person in the room who had failed to experience that life, embodied there in the fellowship of women singing about the possibility of healing and goodness and forgiveness and transformation.

And so, I started singing, "Change my heart, O God." I stepped in closer, and I started singing louder. "Make it ever true."

Okay, yes, I was still totally uncomfortable, but I was leaning into my discomfort, learning from it, letting it just *be*. Actually, it wasn't just

uncomfortable, it was terrifying to let down my defenses like that, to invite these words into my mouth without clarifying what I did or did not *actually* believe, to sing with a full voice about Jesus, and how I believe in him and his love for me, how it saves me.

It was terrifying to give in to the experience, knowing I, too, had experienced pain and shame, beyond what I was willing or able to name. It was terrifying to just be present, in the midst of all that discomfort, in the midst of all that love. Terrifying, and transforming. After that night, I could receive more people more fully, be with more people more fully, love the world more fully, and receive love more fully.

Uncross your arms, lean all the way in. Love is everywhere.

CLOSING MESSAGE

Three voices; three perspectives; three stories on where and how we find love in this world - along with the many images of our own discoveries, from people to pets to birds and trees and the wide, beautiful world around us. On this curious, card-driven holiday, let us be reminded to see the bigger picture so that the search will continue, even in the face of great odds.

I want to share my gratitude to the team I work with every week: to Rose, and Michael, and Yukiko, and the invisible Kelley who keeps things running behind the scenes. We all share a love for this congregation and this faith that inspires us to serve you week after week, and I am so grateful for that.

We'll close our service this morning with the hymn **There Is More Love Somewhere**. I want to remind you that this hymn comes out of the African American experience. Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout reminds us that

“ . . . for those of us who live with the privilege of knowing love, it can be difficult to understand the perspective of one who lives without such a privilege.

. . . it can be difficult to understand the lived experience of those who have trouble finding the evidence of love in their immediate vicinity; in their church; in their neighborhood; in their city; in their nation; even in their planet.

. . . that for some who don't share the privilege of perceiving love “right here,” moving toward that idea of privilege had become a vital practice of Black faith.

. . . if we, as a spiritual community of Unitarian Universalists, populated by well-meaning people, are to mean anything to the lives and the deaths of people of color, we must begin by learning — not squelching — the forms of expression that arise from these living perspectives.

. . . When we inhabit the music, the forms of expression of people who lived their lives along the margins of notice, we must notice that we have entered holy ground, a sacred space of learning; a sacred space of relationship.

Let us share this hymn of yearning together, that someday we might all find the love that would abound in Beloved Community. (put your call in Gallery mode, if you can - to see the face of love that about among us.)

CLOSING HYMN 95 There is More Love Somewhere

**There is more love somewhere
There is more love somewhere
I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it
There is more love somewhere**

**There is more hope
There is more peace
There is more joy**

BENEDICTION from e.e. cummings

*love is the voice under all silences,
the hope which has no opposite in fear;
the strength so strong mere force is febleness:
the truth more first than sun more last than star*