

February Theme

Love: The Practice of Understanding

*The greatest thing you'll ever learn
Is just to love and be loved in return.
~David Bowie*

Introduction

Love is difficult to capture in text because it encompasses something so broad, so elusive. The dictionary tells us love is ‘*a feeling of deep affection or a strong affection for another person.*’ Love is far more than a feeling for many of us. Love is often described as a force or energy. Not only do we send or receive love from others, but we connect to and experience the energy of love inside ourselves. The electromagnetic field of the heart is up to 5,000 times stronger than the brain; the heart has 40,000 sensory neurons taking in information from those around you, then relaying it to your brain. Activity in your heart can be measured in someone else’s brain via EKG equipment. As a result, researchers call the heart the “little brain” and have coined the field ‘neurocardiology’.¹

Human love is flawed, imperfect and messy. Love requires a humbling compassion for ourselves and for those we love. Thich Nhat Hanh teaches us, “Understanding is the foundation of love and compassion.” In order to strengthen our bond with others, compassionately opening our heart is essential. Love may generate a desire to know someone deeply, but this takes a certain letting go to allow ourselves to be known. We may not get there by ‘falling’ but instead through actions and a willingness to have compassion and understanding.

Spiritual traditions have emphasized attributes of love such as generosity, patience, and empathy. Finding ourselves in the magic place of love takes practice and courage, again and again. We can feel the sensual texture of love by being in the here and now, in our bodies, spirits, minds and energetic systems. Love is not a purely mental activity but the choice to feel or express love may be. Love is a feeling that is always available to us; each of us can make a choice to feel in the direction of love. Love may be knowing that we are love, and understanding that the more we align with our heart, the more good we can bring to the world.

Many people feel that some deserve our love and others don’t. And somehow we are all obligated to love our biological families and our intimate partners. And some may find it strange if we want to love our neighbors or feel love for strangers on the street. But before we can embody universal love, we need to investigate our own relationships of unconditional love toward ourselves. Many believe that the way we treat others and the planet stems from how we treat ourselves. Therefore, a response to the call of suffering around the planet depends on each of us working with our own relationship to love and a compassionate understanding of ourselves.

Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:

1. What does our covenant mean for you, when we say “Love is the spirit of this church”?

2. What is the relationship between loving someone and understanding them? Is it a requirement?
3. What kinds of actions do you take to show others you love them?
4. How do you show someone you love that you understand them?
5. How different is love for the stranger, neighbor, or family?
6. Can we love the stranger if we do not understand him/her? How might understanding of the stranger be cultivated?
7. What is the difference between feeling loved and feeling understood? How might they be related?
8. Can you love a hobby or an inanimate object?
9. How do we even know what love is?

Quotes, Short Readings, Songs and Articles

The greatest thing you'll ever learn
Is just to love and be loved in return.

~David Bowie

You can't save people. We can only love them.

~Anais Nin

Trust your heart if the seas catch fire, live by love though the stars walk backward.

~EE Cummings

Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.

~Fyodor Dostoyevsky, 1821 – 1881

Every movement, every glance, every thought, and every word can be infused with love.

~Thich Nhat Hahn

In the end these things matter most: How well did you love? How fully did you live? How deeply did you let go?

~Buddha

Everyone says love hurts, but that is not true. Loneliness hurts. Rejection hurts. Losing someone hurts. Envy hurts. Everyone gets these things confused with love, but in reality love is the only thing in this world that covers up all pain and makes someone feel wonderful again. Love is the only thing in this world that does not hurt.

~Liam Neeson

The Worship Associates are: Tom Bolton, Alexandra Businger, Alan Cantor, Jane Detwiler, Rita Ghilani, Masha Hoeffey, Margaret Homer, Maria Kempner, Julien Lafleur, Marty Nickerson, Jennifer Ollington, and Penn Young.

Spread love everywhere you go: first of all in your own house... Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting.

~*Mother Theresa*

Love isn't a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like struggle. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly that way he or she is right here and now.

~*Mr. Rogers*

“I feel there is nothing more truly artistic than to love people.”

~ Vincent van Gogh

No bird can fly without opening its wings, no one can love without exposing their hearts.

~ *Mark Nepo*

Give all to love;
Obey thy heart;
Friends, kindred, days,
Estate, good-fame,
Plans, credit and the Muse,—
Nothing refuse.
'T is a brave master;
Let it have scope:
Follow it utterly,
Hope beyond hope.
It was never for the mean;
It requireth courage stout.
Souls above doubt,
Valor unbending,
It will reward,—
They shall return
More than they were,
And ever ascending.

~*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Let us fall in Love again
and scatter gold dust all over the world.
Let us become a new spring,
and feel the breeze drift in the heaven's scent.

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Let us dress the earth in green,
and like the sap of a young tree
let the grace from within sustain us.
Let us carve gems out of our stony hearts,
and let them light our path to LOVE.
The glance of Love is crystal clear,
and we are blessed by its light.
~ *Rumi*

Life is the first gift
Love is the second
And understanding the third
~*Marge Piercy*

Even
After
All this time
The Sun Never Says
To the Earth,
“You owe me.”
Look
What happens
With a love like that.
It lights the
Whole
Sky ~*Hafiz*

Each of us has lived through some devastation, some loneliness, some weather superstorm or spiritual superstorm. When we look at each other we must say, I understand. I understand how you feel because I have been there myself. We must support each other because each of us is more alike than we are unlike.
~*Maya Angelou*

The choice to follow love through to its completion is the choice to seek completion within ourselves. The point at which we shut down on others is the point at which we shut down on life. We heal as we heal others, and we heal others by extending our perceptions past their weaknesses. Until we have seen someone's darkness, we don't really know who that person is. Until we have forgiven someone's darkness, we don't really know what love is. Forgiving others is the only way to forgive ourselves, and forgiveness is our greatest need.
~*Marianne Williamson*

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Falling in love you remain a child; rising in love you mature. By and by love becomes not a relationship, it becomes a state of your being. Not that you are in love – now you are love.

~Osho

For this reason loving involves commitment. We are not automatic lovers of self, others, world, or God. Love does not just happen. We are not love machines, puppets on the strings of a deity called “love.” Love is a choice — not simply, or necessarily, a rational choice, but rather a willingness to be present to others without pretense or guile. Love is a conversion to humanity — a willingness to participate with others in the healing of a broken world and broken lives.

~Carter Heyward

Hearing the bell, I am able to let go of all afflictions. My heart is calm, my sorrows ended. I am no longer bound to anything. I learn to listen to my suffering and the suffering of the other person. When understanding is born in me, compassion is also born.

~Thich Nhat Hanh

Choosing love aligns you with your soul. Your soul is the part of you that remembers where you came from (love). So to choose love means to bring your soul back into your body. It is the blocks of fear that get in the way, and as these blocks are removed, you will be able to experience love’s power.

~Excerpt from [Choosing Love](#) by Sherianna Boyle

But how are we to love when we are stiff and numb and disinterested? How are we to transform ourselves into limber and soft organisms lying open to the world at the quick? By what process and what agency do we perform the Great Work, transforming lowly materials into gold? Love, like its counterpart Death, is a yielding at the center. Not in the sentiment. Nor in the genitals. Look deep into my eyes and see the love-light. Figured forth in intelligent cooperation, sensitive congeniality, physical warmth. At the center the love must live... Love is not a doctrine, Peace is not an international agreement. Love and peace are beings who live as possibilities in us.

~Mary Caroline Richards

David Bowie and Queen “Under Pressure” acapella version, link to song:

<http://www.mindblowingvideos.com/how-under-pressure-sounds-without-music-freddie-mercury-and-david-bowie-a-cappella.html>

Excerpt:

Turned away from it all like a blind man
Sat on a fence but it don't work
Keep coming up with love
But it's so slashed and torn

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Why - why - why?
Love love love love love
Insanity laughs under pressure we're breaking
Can't we give ourselves one more chance
Why can't we give love that one more chance
Why can't we give love give love give love give love
Give love give love give love give love give love
Because love's such an old fashioned word
And love dares you to care for
The people on the (People on streets) edge of the night
And loves (People on streets) dares you to change our way of
Caring about ourselves
This is our last dance
This is our last dance
This is ourselves
Under pressure

Reference:

1. 7 Scientific Reasons You Should Listen To Your Heart (Not Your Brain)

By cardiologist Dr. Joel Kahn

Link to article:

<http://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-11982/7-scientific-reasons-you-should-listen-to-your-heart-not-your-brain.html>

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