

Whats Love Got to Do With It?

**A sermon delivered to the Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship, Thunder Bay, ON
Sunday, December 7, 2014**

Reading#1: “If I Speak in the Tongues of Men and of Angels” 1st Corinthians, chapter 13: verses 1-13

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Reading #2: “Some Random Thoughts on Love” The Rev. David E. Bumbaugh

Love!

Love,

They say, makes the world go round.

Love!

God is love, or so they say.

“Love, love, hooray for love; who was ever too blasé for love?”

“Love is the doctrine of this church.”

Love is the beginning and the end of our existence.” Love is never having to say, ‘I’m sorry.’”

Love is the hostage we give to an uncertain future....

Perhaps that is why love is so difficult for us;

Perhaps that is why love seems so utterly irrelevant to world problems and global challenge:

We have lost the aptitude for mystical union;

We are left with a formless yearning,

For what, we know not.

We busily guard the fortress of our uniqueness, failing to see ourselves in others

Or others in us;

Forgetting the fact

That we receive our very selves

As gifts from the hands of others,

That we are sustained in life

By the faithfulness of others,
 That we understand ourselves
 Only as we see ourselves
 Reflected in the eyes of others.
 We busily guard ourselves
 From the imperative of love,
 The injunction that until we are prepared to lose ourselves
 We shall never truly find ourselves.
 We busily guard ourselves from the full implication of love –
 That all people under the sun
 Regardless of time
 And death,
 And the space between the stars
 Are one kin,
 Flesh of our flesh,
 Bone of our bone, bound together in inescapable unity
 Destined to the same end,
 Bound together in a mystic oneness
 The origin of which we may never know;
 The reality of which we can never escape.
 We guard ourselves against the radical truth
 That it is our separateness
 Which is the great illusion.

Love is a private matter with public overtones,
 With corporate imperatives.
 When one human being is exalted, all are enhanced.
 When one human being is belittled,
 All are diminished.
 To see the world in human perspective is to see the world
 In the first person plural:
 Not me and mine, not he and hers, not they and theirs
 But we, and ours,
 And us.

Love,
 They say,
 Makes the world go 'round.
 God is love, or so they say.
 Love is the beginning and the end of our existence,
 The hostage we give to an uncertain future,
 The only shelter we have against a cold,
 Pitiless, indifferent universe.
 "Ah, love, let us be true to one another..."

The Rev. David E. Bumbaugh, "Some Random Thoughts on Love"

Sermon: *What's Love Got to Do with It?* Suzanne Wasilczuk

Today is the National Day of Remembrance & Action on Violence Against Women here in Canada.

Today we remember the **Montreal Massacre**, the killing of twenty-eight people on December 6, 1989 at the [École Polytechnique](#) in [Montreal](#), Quebec, Canada.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89cole_Polytechnique_massacre; accessed 22 November 2014.

We remember the many First Nations, Inuit or Métis women and girls who have been murdered or have gone missing in the past 30 years. – over 1000 women and girls murdered; over 100 women and girls missing under suspicious circumstances or for undetermined reasons in the past few years.

<http://www.amnesty.ca/blog/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-and-girls-understanding-the-numbers>; accessed 22 November 2014.

On the 10th we celebrate International Human Rights Day.

And on the 14th – in my country – we remember the 2nd anniversary of the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT, where 20 children and 6 adults were killed.

In this season of light and love we ask: What's love got to do with it?

Singer Tina Turner asks: "What's love got to do, got to do with it?" What's love but a second-hand emotion?

What's love got to do, got to do with it

Who needs a heart

When a heart can be broken

What's love got to do it? with our responses as a nation. As a community. As a people of faith.

What's love got to do with our spiritual dimension? Our religious quest? What's love got to do with our response to these tragedies?

What's love got to do with it?

How might we incorporate the idea of love when building our theology, or our a-theology?

A word about theology.

According to one rabbinical tale, *theology* means brooding over what God is worrying about when God arises in the morning. We do theology – or, if we prefer to construct our meaning-of-life without a god – we do our a-theology – when we – in theist terms – brood over what we think an almighty, an-all-enveloping, an all-compassionate and all-just Entity would worry about upon arising.

We do theology – in humanist terms – when we think about what are the guiding principles and purposes of our life; when we think about what the finest, the wisest, the most compassionate human would worry about upon arising.

We think about how to bring peace to our lives, to our families, to our nation, to the world. We think about justice. We brood on the idea of an earth made fair and all her people one. We "stew about repairing creation's brokenness." (*FM*, 63)

That's theology. That's a-theology. Systematically, thoughtfully, heartfully pondering the meaning and direction of life.

Practical spirituality, or theology, or philosophy, or ethics then asks what is our role in this meaning and direction. What are we to do? How are we to live?

“What’s love got to do, got to do with it?”
 What’s love but a sweet, old-fashioned notion?
 Oh what’s love got to do, got to do with it
 Who needs a heart
 When a heart can be broken”

Is love just a matter of chemicals, pheromones, elusive, odorless chemicals given off in response to sexual stimulation or romantic fantasy?
 Is love, and its cousin altruism – unselfish concern for the welfare of others – is love somehow programmed into our DNA? Is love all in our heads, or all in our genes?

Religions through the ages have focused on love – an all-encompassing Creative Love, and a practical, down-to-earth, fix-the-world kind of love.

Our Universalist heritage claims that love is central. Tom Owen-Towle, in his book *Freethinking Mystics with Hands*, writes: “Universalism trusts that all of us are held in the arms of universal love, no matter what we have done or not done. Held is the operative term. This day, and throughout one’s entire life, the full-blown cosmos rests in the grasp of a loving power. Such is the overruling Universalist affirmation.” (*FM*, 62)

UU chaplain Keith Goheen writes: “When responding to the great commandment to love God, neighbor and self, Unitarian Universalism has been one of the rare faiths to place love of self in any prioritizing other than last. It is a great gift to all who will hear this good news, but it remains the incomplete story. All three of the commandment’s components must be held in a dynamic, healthy balance.

While fully loving ourselves, we are still invited to immerse the self into love of community, moving from I to we. And the community, in order to avoid becoming stagnated in self-adulation, must learn how to immerse itself in the transcendent reality on which we are utterly dependent.” That rest in the grasp of a loving power.

Love of God – or of something greater than ourselves; love of neighbor; love of self “must be held in ...dynamic, healthy balance.”

Love of God cannot predominate, lest we forget love and justice in the here and now.

Love of neighbor cannot predominate, lest we lose ourselves, the gift of our difference, our uniqueness, and become not simply selfless, but without a self.

Love of self cannot predominate, lest we forget our own shortcomings, our own sins, and grow smug, self-righteous, lose sight of that which is greater, that which we serve.

Rebecca Ann Parker, president of the UU Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley, California writes:

"We must continue to search until we find the illumination for our time. It came to George Fox alone in the wilderness and it came to many of our religious ancestors in the community of resistance, the realization that we are part of a universal love. There is something that will not let us go. It is in obedience to this truth that the promise of life is fulfilled in us and we become a blessing to the world. We may come to know this love as a fierce rebellion lodged in the human heart that will rage against

oppression and injustice until the end. Or we may come to know it, as I have, as a divine comforter who has never left and will never leave, and who embraces even the violators of covenant with the fire of redeeming love.

Regardless of how we come to this love, the experience of brokenness is the place of revelation, and that revelation is what will fuel a new covenant.

(Blessing the World, Rebecca Parker, 88)

We do theology. We do a-theology. We brood on repairing creation's brokenness.

Religions through the ages have brooded on love as an answer to brokenness.

Taoism speaks of Love as that which births us all.

In the 1st verse of *The Tao, The Way*, it is written:

Before the birth of the physical
 There was the birth of potential.
 Before potential, something primal.
 A Beingness. One Life, silent, unmoving, unchanging,
 The unspoken beauty of Truth,
 Mother only to Itself.

It has been called God, Tao, Divine Mother,
 Universal Mind.
 Today it feels good to call it Love,
 Or perhaps Spirit of Love,
 Since Spirit implies an all-pervading greatness
 As common as one's breath.

Love is not an emotion, or a feeling.
 It is the formlessness and substance permeating
 The seen and the unseen;
 It is the seed and womb of the universe.
 Call it what you will, it resides
 Just beyond the limits of our abilities to describe.

It has been said "God is Love."
 Thus, the Heavens seek Love
 Earth seeks Love
 People seek Love.
 This is what makes us great.

People abide on the Earth
 Earth abides in the Heavens
 The Heavens abide in Love.
 Love abides in all.
 This is what makes us One.

(The Tao of Healing, #1)

Love births us all. Love abides in all.

In Islam the first pillar – of five pillars of the faith – is the injunction to acknowledge in prayer, five times a day, our love and submission to the will of Allah, a just and loving God.

The third pillar of Islam recognizes a different aspect of love – almsgiving. A certain percentage of one's income must be given to the community each year. In its expanded meaning, the Muslim faith obliges one to do good works, to be a comrade to ones neighbors, to submit to God's will and be of service, working for a more just world. (*Many Peoples, Many Faiths*, 386)

In our Story for All Ages, a Hindu story of love and caring for community – we learn of a king who discovers that caring for his country and its people – caring tangibly: ensuring that basic needs are met, providing for a fair and compassionate use of resources, changing laws to ensure love and justice – caring for his country and its people was pivotal for true peace. The dog, god's dog, is brooding and barking his concern for creation's brokenness. Nothing but love writ large can quiet his wailing.

What's love got to do with it? Everything, the story tells us.

In Christianity the virtue of love is seen as “a gracious principle or habit wrought in the soul by God, which inclines us to delight in, esteem, and earnestly desire to enjoy an interest in God's favour, and communion with him as our chief good, portion, and happiness, and the fountain of all perfection and excellence; and which likewise disposes us to do good to all, especially to such as resemble God in holiness, and bear his image. (*Cruden's Concordance*, 357)

We read in the Greek Bible, in 1 Corinthians 13, this well-known passage:

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.... So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

Peter Gomes, a professor and minister at Harvard University, observes that this translation of “love” is not much older than fifty years. “Before then,” he writes, “the English translation of the Bible most commonly used was the King James Version of 1611, in which 1 Corinthians had the word ‘charity’ in place of what in the Revised Standard Version of 1952 was rendered as ‘love.’”

Charity includes the older notions of philanthropy and of social welfare. Corinthians is not a reading appropriate for a wedding, but rather a call to arms, a rally to social reform, an injunction to heal creation's brokenness. (TGL, 306)

The demands of this sort of love “express themselves in deeds that are not necessarily based upon proximity, kindred, or affection. If love is simply a matter of loving those who love you, then, what is the point?” (TGL, 314)

The Danish religious philosopher Soren Kierkegaard writes: “Christian love is self-denying love. That means we are obliged to love even those whom we would rather not. We cannot simply love those whom we would prefer to love, because that is too easy although it is difficult enough, and its problem is that it is only partial. Christian love is supposed to reflect the wholeness of God's love, God who loves everybody....”

The neighbor, [Kierkegaard] argues, is one who is equal, and that means one's fellow human being.... Whoever is born, lives, and is destined to die is our equal, and hence our neighbor.” (TGL, 317)

Kierkegaard, in his book *Works of Love*, writes that “to the Christian love is the works of love. To say that love is a feeling or anything of the kind is an un-Christian conception of love. That (love is a feeling) is the aesthetic definition and therefore fits the erotic and everything of that nature. But to the Christian love is the works of love. Christ’s love was not an inner feeling, a full heart and what not, it was the work of love which was his life.” (TGL, 313)

This is what is Christian love: “We should think of love not in terms of what it is, but in terms of what it does, and why it does it.” (TGL, 315)

What’s love got to do with it?

Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, a Buddhist meditation master, urges his readers to transform their lives through love and compassion. Gyatso argues that we need to feel affectionate and cherishing love for all living beings. When we meditate on the ways these other beings lack happiness – often manifested in how they make us unhappy – we develop wishing love, a wish that all living beings may ripen, may flourish, and may attain long-lasting happiness.

We “transform [our] body into a wish-fulfilling jewel, sparkling with light, whose rays purify all levels of existence, and allow all inhabitants to receive what they need to feel satisfied.

We not only meditate on this change, this transformation, this enlightenment for all, we work to change the world, to ensure the conditions for true happiness. We work for economic justice. For social equality. For environmental integrity. (*Universal Compassion*, 37-38)

The meditation called the *Metta Bhavana* is a meditation on universal loving kindness. It is said to be one of four meditations known as the “abodes of the gods.” Practicing this meditation is said to bring us into the same frame of mind as the gods.

The meditation starts with directing concern towards ourselves. The Buddhist teacher Paramananda writes, “Our happiness has to be based upon love towards ourselves, for if it is dependent upon the love coming to us from others it will sooner or later break down. We have to learn to like ourselves for what we are, not in comparison with others. When we have positive feelings towards ourselves it becomes much easier then to like others; we are not threatened by them, we wish them to be happy as well.

So, the first stage is directing *metta* – universal loving-kindness – toward yourself. Become open-hearted and tender toward yourself. Bring to mind what you can appreciate in yourself. And say to yourself: “May I be well, may I be happy, may I be free from suffering, may I make progress.”

Now bring to mind a good friend, someone whose company you enjoy. It is said that this person should be about your own age, still living, and of the same sex. Think of what it is you appreciate in this person. Become more open-hearted and tender toward this person. And say: “May this person be well, may s/he be happy, may s/he be free from suffering, may this person make progress.”

Now call to mind a neutral person, someone you have no strong feelings towards – someone you work with, or someone you meet in your neighborhood. Feel solidarity with this person. Feel open-hearted and tender toward this person, not because they have a direct impact on your life, but simply because they are alive, too. And say: “May this person be well, may s/he be happy, may s/he be free from suffering, may this person make progress.”

Now we will move into more difficult territory. Bring to mind someone whom you dislike, or find truly difficult or irritating. An acquaintance. A politician. A member of your family. Be careful to not pick someone towards whom you harbor feelings of hate. Remember: it is often harder to give up what we hate. But, bring to mind this person. You may feel unable to experience loving-kindness toward such a person. If this person were happier, more aware, kinder, would you still find them so difficult? You are not denying the hurts this person may have inflicted upon you. You are trying to break the circle of hatred, of distrust, or irritation. Remember, be kind to yourself; be easy on yourself. And say: “May this person be well, may s/he be happy, may s/he be free from suffering, may this person make progress.”

Finally, bring together yourself, your beloved friend, the neutral person, and the difficult person. Hold the thought: “May I feel equal *metta* for all these people. May I feel equal loving-kindness toward all these people.

(Imagine expanding the range of your *metta*, the range of your loving-kindness, toward all beings. Wish all beings well. Wish all being freedom from suffering. Wish that all beings may make progress towards true happiness.)

Slowly, bring your awareness back to yourself, this time, this place.

(Adapted from *Change Your Mind*, 47-70)

What’s love got to do with it?

Singer-songwriter Judy Fjell asks us:

“What’s it all about?

It’s all about love.

What’s it all about?

It’s about justice.

What’s it all about?

It’s about love and justice,

And the way we all live in the world.”

For those of us whose mythic story is theist, God is love, and we attempt to love as God does, universally.

For those of us whose mythic story is humanist, love is a human emotion from which springs caring, community, compassion, a sense of justice.

Our hymns tell us of:

Love, the guest, the rose, the star.

Love born again: the truth of dream.

Inclusive Love.

Love the product of hard, hard work.

May we, and all creatures, know love, be love, breath love, live love, act love.

May we be well. Be happy. Grow in love.

May we remember that all people under the sun
Regardless of time
And death,
And the space between the stars
Are one kin,
Flesh of our flesh,
Bone of our bone, bound together in inescapable unity
Destined to the same end,
 “Ah, love, let us be true to one another...”

May it ever be so. May we make it so. Blessed Be. Amen.