

You Are The Field Where Love Is Working

1 Corinthians 3:1-9; February 12, 2017

In all my years as a pastor, I have never given a sermon on Love around Valentine's Day. It can be trickier than you expect for a preacher to approach the Hallmark holidays – you know, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and so on. The feelings tend to run deep! I once preached a sermon on Mother's Day in which I mentioned that some folks have Moms who were *challenging* to grow up with. I got some *high heat* for that comment from the pro-Mom contingent on Mother's Day, but I also got appreciation from a bunch of folks in the congregation who considered that *they* had had *challenging* mothers. I don't remember any sermon I have ever preached that caused more of a ruckus or lasted so long. Who knew that Mom was such a minefield of a topic!

So today I approach the subject of love and relationship around Valentine's Day with some caution. Hard for me to know what your thoughts may be. Personally, I find most writing and preaching on the subject of love and relationship unhelpful and humorless. Indeed, I suspect that a sense of humor may have sustained many a relationship. I remember when I was a very young pastor, there was a couple in the church who had been married 60 years, Jim and Mary Douglas. After church one Sunday around their anniversary, I asked Mrs. Douglas what was perhaps an ill-timed question. I asked her if over those years, she had ever thought of divorcing Jim. She took the question well, thought about it for a moment and then said, "Divorce Jim? Murder him, yes, divorce him, no!"

Well, there you are. Long-term marriages are clearly more than chocolates and roses!

Here's the thing. When we celebrate marriage here in the church, we do so by counting the years as a measure of success: 25, 35, 60, 70 years. There's nothing wrong with that. Yet it leaves out so much. It seems to cast a pall of lack or failure on those whose marriages didn't last so long. Can we not speak of them in church?

And it leaves out entirely people who never had a chance at marriage.

In the early 1990's I did a funeral service for a very popular high school principal. Our church was full to overflowing – more than 600 people, adults, kids, choirs, a school band. Beautiful service. But there were secrets, not terrible secrets, just hidden. In those days one did not announce that the deceased died of AIDS; it was considered shameful. And one did not celebrate the grieving spouse when that person was a gay partner of more than thirty years. Same-sex marriage was not legal and same-sex relationship was not mentioned much in church. My heart went out to the partner that day as he sat, back in the crowd with a few friends, hidden, unrecognized. That was the day I began advocating that our church become a home where all God's people are not just welcomed, but loved and openly affirmed and celebrated.

What if we, as people of faith, were to be truthful?

- What if we were to acknowledge that commitment cannot be measured just in certificates and years?
- What if we were to admit that even healthy relationships may have an end?

Most of all, what if we were to ask what love **is**, really? We call certain people into our lives in the name of Love. These partners, spouses, romantic relationship bring with them lessons about intimacy, power, trust, aging, betrayal, expectation, dreams and desires, our sense of worth. And all these lessons are wrapped up in a word we call Love. But what is Love, really? And why, at the end of the day, is Love worth the lessons it brings?

Love is bigger than us. To adapt Paul's words in the scripture this morning, love is the field we live and move and have our being in. We do not create Love. We do not "make" Love. We plant ourselves and our "loved ones" in it. We water our relationships and make them grow. We are not in control of Love and our success in love is not measured in years. We acknowledge the full beauty of love when we see that what we plant and water has seasons, but Love itself cannot be taken away from us.

Love is more than a feeling. It is an appreciation, an allowing of the seasons and the lessons of life. It is the air we breathe, the breath we take. It is the field we play out our stories in. Love works in us, for us, around us. When we invite another person to join us, it is Love itself that invites us to leave measurements behind. In the words of the poet Rumi: *Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there. When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to talk about.*

Yes, a place that needs few words. A place to call *home*.

Amen