

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



February 20, 2022



LOVE

Rebellion and the Valentine

by Drew Downs

We have associated love with Valentine for centuries. Which was always the point. But the example of love we receive from the saint we know as Valentine resonates beyond romance. Flowers and candy can't cut it.

Valentine was executed by the state for breaking the law. A law forbidding soldiers from marrying. A law written because the emperor believed married soldiers would be

less effective. In short, more attached and less violent.

The emperor forbade love because it might *prevent war*.

We are offered an image here of a *rebellious* love. Not one contained in flowers or chocolates, but in generosity and sacrifice. And because God *is* love, then we are sharing in God's transformative power.

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Winter 2022

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

When I was young, I liked to condemn Valentine's Day as a "Hallmark Holiday". This was mostly my being angsty. But the funny thing is - I wasn't wrong. More like half right.

Valentine's Day obviously has Christian origins. But it isn't one of our feast days. Not anymore. Which means we no longer celebrate it. So now, it actually *does* belong to Hallmark more than the church.

Of course, feast days for saints aren't supposed to be *that* big of a deal anyway. Not compared to our Principal Feasts or the Feasts of Our Lord. This is not to say they are *unimportant*, just *less* important. But you have to dig pretty deep in your friendship circle to find people more into The Presentation (Candlemas) on February 2 than Valentine's on the 14th.

I don't think this is bad. Just...out of proportion. A little skewed. It's not unlike the impulse to "put Christ into Christmas". I think He does a pretty good job of that on his own. Maybe **we** can put some more rebellious love into our everyday lives.

In the coming weeks, we will be wrapping up this season after the Epiphany. And given this week's COVID numbers, we anticipate the return of two beloved customs:

- Coffee Hour will return February 27th for both services.
- Our Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper is tentatively planned for March 1.

With love,
Drew

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Winter 2022

FOR SUNDAY

The Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

February 20, 2022

Collect

○ Lord, you have taught us that without love whatever we do is worth nothing: Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts your greatest gift, which is love, the true bond of peace and of all virtue, without which whoever lives is accounted dead before you. Grant this for the sake of your only Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Luke 6:27-38

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. "

Reflection

One of the images I've taken to in recent years is to see church as a school of love. We're here learning to love, together. Like the disciples, we're active learners. We learn and do; learning by doing.

One of the downsides to this image is that we sometimes make the mistake of thinking education is about learning "the right way" to do things rather than learning the things themselves.

This often comes out in the form of "shoulds". As in all the things we should do if we're *really* Christians. And what is a "should" but an unrealized and under-supported expectation?

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Beneath our "shoulds" and "right" ways of doing things is a fascinating tension. A tension between inward and outward focus. We focus on ourselves and others with an eye of evaluation.

For some of us, this is a scrutiny we level at ourselves and our own behavior. We name the list of things we should have done. Or done differently. And sometimes we level that scrutiny at others. To name all of the "shoulds" for them. Neither approach strikes me as the least bit healthy. *But I've come to expect them.*

The way Jesus talks about love in this sermon is utterly antithetical to our standard way of doing things. We love to operate under the assumption of reciprocity, economics, give and take. We are taught love capitalism and tell each other that love is expressed in hand-written thank you notes and deep acts of devotion.

In other words, we're taught love is narcissistic. We have to *prove* our love. Acts of love are received more than given.

Jesus flips that around. It is about *our* giving. Not our receiving. *Or their receiving.* Gifts that require thank yous aren't gifts. They're exchanges.

If this touches a nerve (as it does for me), then we can turn that discomfort toward learning! See how we care how loving *other people* are! Even this, which is about *my* expression of love, turns to *you*. Because we've learned in American culture that love is defined by giving and receiving "the right way."

Jesus is redefining love for us. Which may be hard to learn. But it is beautiful. And freeing. Because the love Jesus describes isn't built on evaluating the love of our neighbors. Or collecting love like presents. It is in offering love generously. And without strings attached.

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