

The Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden

Saying “Yes” to Love Kayla Parker, Ministerial Intern February 15, 2015

What is love anyways?

I’m probably not the best authority on the subject, honestly.

I mess it up every single day.

I can be a really horrible and difficult partner.
I’ve been a really crappy friend sometimes
And I have definitely been way too bossy of a sister
And not the best daughter.
I can not show up for my family and friends.
Not show up for my community.

I mess up this love thing all the time.
And really, who hasn’t?

We all have.
And that’s just part of being human.

Jamaica in our story this morning certainly messed up, right?
She wanted to keep a stuffed dog that wasn’t her own
for herself.
And what did her mother do?
She came in and sat with Jamaica
hugging her, loving her right through her mistakes.

Love is hard.
And we mess up.
And we have to forgive ourselves and each other.
We have to begin again in love.

Let's all do that right now, actually.
We might not have messed up in this sanctuary, but we might have.
And we probably all messed up yesterday, if not already today.
Let's not just let ourselves sit there.
We can't, really.
We need to show up for one another and ourselves in love.

So let's start talking about love thing
by first airing our mistakes with one another
and reconciling together.

There's actually a beautiful song for this in
Singing the Living Journey, our teal hymnals
that Alan is going to lead us in.
But don't worry about grabbing the books,
We won't need them!

There will be a line read of something
some of us or many of us have done
and would like to put behind us, be forgiven for.
And then we will all answer in response this refrain:

*Sung: We forgive ourselves and each other,
We begin again in love.*

All together three times:

One: *We forgive ourselves and each other,
We begin again in love.*

Two: *We forgive ourselves and each other,
We begin again in love.*

Three: *We forgive ourselves and each other,
We begin again in love.*

Let us begin.
“For remaining silent,
when a single voice would have made a difference”

“Hands up”

Two

For each time that our fears have made us rigid and inaccessible

Three

For each time we have struck out in anger without just cause

Four

For each time that our greed has blinded us to the needs of others

Five

For the selfishness that sets us apart and alone

Six

For losing sight of our unity

Seven

For those and for so many acts both evident and subtle, which have fueled the illusion of separateness

Love is hard, and we mess up.
And we forgive ourselves and each other.
We begin again in love.

So now that we've acknowledged that we all mess up
and have done some community resolution,
perhaps we can get back to our first question:

What is love?

Because it's really hard to do.
And it's also really hard to understand.

I'm already confused when I think about what it really means,
for example, to be Standing on the Side of Love,
and then I was sitting in my ethics class this week,

And we're talking about these two dead old white guys,
who are also incredibly prominent ethicists,
Reinhold Niebuhr and Augustine
and what they see as basically the purpose of life
and how love fits into all this.

and my professor said, yeah, so it's really hard to talk about all this,
in English
because we only have one word for love:
love
but in other languages there are a lot more with many distinct meanings.

In Greek, there are supposedly six different terms for love.
Now, six is a lot,
And these big important ethicists talked about three,
So let's just stay there for today at least.

These three different types of love are:
eros
agape
and philia.

Now if you're familiar with these in other contexts,
I invite you now to be open to what these words mean
through the particular lens of ethics,
as they might take on different focuses
than you've heard before.

The first love, is eros
eros is love of the other
for the sake of the self

*eros is love of the other
for the sake of the self*

The second love is philia,
Philia is love of the other,
for the sake of our relationship

*Philia is love of the other,
for the sake of our relationship*

The third love is agape,
Agape is love of the other,
for the sake of the other

*Agape is love of the other,
for the sake of the other*

So here are some tricks to remember these
Eros is love of the other
for the sake of the self.

And it starts with an “E”, Eros
As does another short word that starts with an E,
Ego
Eros is all about me,
Ego is all about me.
So eros is love of the other
for the sake of the self.

Say it with me twice?
*Eros is love of the other
for the sake of the self*

*Eros is love of the other
for the sake of the self*

Great,
On to Philia.
Philia sounds a lot like Filia
Which gets us thinking about children and parents
about relationships.
So Philia is love of the other,
for the sake of our relationship

Say it with me twice?
*Philia is love of the other,
for the sake of our relationship*

*Philia is love of the other,
for the sake of our relationship*

Onto our last love!
Agape makes me think of a gap
that you jump right into!
All in! Jumping all in into a huge gap!!

And so, Agape is love of the other,
for the sake of the other

Say it with me twice, one last time?

*Agape is love of the other,
for the sake of the other*

*Agape is love of the other,
for the sake of the other*

You all did a great job.

Now, test time:
That's right.
Will make you think twice about having another
intern from Yale Divinity School ever again, huh?

But really, you all have this.

Let's say everything twice,
one last time,
with hand motions

Eros!

Eros is love for the other,
for the sake of the self.

*Eros is love for the other,
for the sake of the self.*

Philia!
Philia is love of the other,
for the sake of our relationship

*Philia is love of the other,
for the sake of our relationship*

Agape!
Agape is love of the other,
for the sake of the other

*Agape is love of the other,
for the sake of the other*

So let's think back to our opening story we had
when the whole congregation was with us.
Jamaica's find:

What kind of love do you think Jamaica was experiencing
for that little stuff dog she found at the park?

Just shout it out.

Right! Eros!

It was for her own sake,
not for the sake of anyone
or anything else.

And what kind of love do you think Jamaica was experiencing

when she decided to turn that dog in, and then brought it's owner to it?

Right! Agape!

She didn't really know this girl – it wasn't Philia,
for the sake of her relationship.

It was self-sacrificing,
self-transcending love.

And the prominent ethicist Niebuhr and our young little teacher Jamaica
They agreed about one thing
The MOST IMPORTANT thing
is agape,
agape
Self-transcending love
love of the other
for the sake of the other

Niebuhr goes to far to say that our purpose
and the very law of our existence that we cannot escape
is Agape.
Self-transcending love.

Now Niebuhr would say the object of this self-transcendant love
is both God and our neighbors.
Now some of us might not want to use God,
might want Goddess or Spirit of Life, or Higher Power, or Deeper Power.
And others might just want the neighbors part.

But let's get back to this.
A prominent theologian just told us
that the purpose of life
is self-transcending, sacrificing love for the sake of the other,
our neighbor, our deeper power, higher power.

AND he said that this is just the very law of our existence.
Why do we keep doing this love that can be so hard
and so painful?

According to Niebuhr, it's just because we have to!
We can't not!
It's the law of our existence!

And because it's the law of our existence,
it is fulfilling for us to have and live into
this self-transcending love of the other we are capable of!

Now we might disagree with Niebuhr.
But he's a pretty brilliant important guy.
So I'm gonna ask that we at least consider what he said.
Consider what it means if our purpose in life
is to love others in a selfless self-transcendent manner.

What would this look like for us in our own lives?
What might we be capable of?
What would we have to do to love like this?

May we consider this.
May we act on this, even if we just try it out for a day or two.

Agape
Love of the other
for the sake of the other.

Self-transcendent love for our neighbors
for the spirits or connections that guide our lives.

May we, in this space,
and outside of it,
try out this agape love
and just see what it can do.

May we say yes to love.
May we sing yes to love, now, together.
Please,
Rise in body or in spirit

and join me in singing
Just as long as I have breath,
Number 6 in Singing the Living Tradition,
Our dark blue hymnal.