

Love in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
Rev. Kathleen Owens  
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I have to tell you – I could preach on this month’s worship theme – Love – for a whole month of Sundays. Love in its many forms is all around us. For instance recently on January 9 the New York Times printed an article “To Fall in Love with Anyone, Do This” written by Mandy Len Catron. In the article she refers to an experiment and questionnaire developed 20 years ago by psychologist Dr. Arthur Aron. The experiment involved one man and one woman who both enter a lab and sitting face to face begin to answer questions. These questions were designed to become increasingly more personal – forcing each other, if they answered honestly to become more and more vulnerable as the questions progress. And as it turned out, the two people in the experiment eventually found themselves in love and married six months later. We are hungry for love. One of the pleasures I enjoy on Saturdays is reading the LA Times – I especially enjoy the section called Saturday – it has a few short articles on many topics especially food and beverages, exercise, home interior décor, among others but my guilty pleasure is reading the L.A. Affairs section – on the back page...it’s a page that ‘chronicles dating in and around Los Angeles...not that I’m looking – no way – I’m happily married. I like this section (mostly) because it talks about the numerous ways, the many attempts of men and women trying to meet a special person with whom they can, might or do share a life together. I like reading about how they try to meet people and the stories they tell. I like reading about their attempts – what they are willing to do and how the story works out. Most of the time – the relationship doesn’t work and I’m always impressed about how we as a people keep trying...what creativity people have; how brave some are to be vulnerable and risk changing a habit or trying a new way of connecting. And this section, if nothing else, offers a short escape

reading about someone else's life and their experiments in finding love – usually love with another but often there grows a love of oneself or a lover of one's city – finding new and undiscovered delights within a city filled with people who are looking to connect.

This is, I know a very old fashion way to look for a possible partner – especially today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. People don't need newspapers or their Classified section anymore – not when the Internet is just a click away...and on the 'Net – the dating sites are almost beyond number...and aren't they so much better...with the possibility of pictures and maybe even videos... now I know some of you have met your beloved from an on-line site and I think that's great. I remember when these sites were new and I would be talking with a couple as they planned their wedding – and when I asked them to tell me how they met, a look of embarrassment would cross their faces as they confessed to meeting each other on-line. But we have to admit that many dating sites may not be all they promise – it's now a common laugh line on television shows or in comedian acts to joke about someone's on-line profile picture not matching the person that shows up at the coffee bar for that dreaded first in-person date. And several dating sites claim to be scientifically accurate in finding the perfect mate for you...just recently in an airline's magazine there was an ad that said, "We search our Network of over 200,000 amazing women to find your perfect match. We've got this chemistry thing down to a science."<sup>1</sup> The quest for love is everywhere and I hope that happens / for many of us long for love in our life...a love that is shared with another person that makes our lives feel more fulfilled. It seems finding love in the 21<sup>st</sup> century involves the use of technology in a big way.

Love in this century also looks very different that it did in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century...with the almost hard-to-believe advancement of marriage equality. I have to honestly say that I never

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<sup>1</sup> Southwest magazine, January edition, 2015.

thought I would live to see the day, let alone get to have the honor myself of getting to legally marry the woman I love. Our faith tradition has long stood on the side of love, honoring and welcoming people who are lesbian and gay, and then people who are bisexual and transgender not only into our congregation's, but in leadership positions and clergy – far ahead of many other liberal faith traditions. And it is a very sad state indeed that some of our Christian cousins are still in turmoil and pain over the inclusion of people who are LGBT in their congregations. But there are reasons for hope. Church member Peggy Holl shared an article with me from a January issue of Time magazine<sup>2</sup> and it had a lot of good information including a chart that showed the percentage of U.S. religious groups who have grown in their increased support for marriage equality. From 2001 to the present with White evangelical Protestants whose support has grown 8% up to the highest group white mainline Protestants coming in at a 22% increase. Now I know that 8% is a low number but consider this group – white evangelicals – this is a group for whom even having an honest conversation with “the other side” – that would be people like us or other LGBT positive groups or institutions – would have been viewed as an unacceptable compromise. It is important to realize that this debate over LGBT inclusion and marriage equality isn't really the issue...as the authors of this article write, “For many evangelicals, the marriage debate isn't really about marriage or families or sex – it is about the Bible itself. ...The roots of the conflict are deeply theological. Evangelical faith prizes the Bible's authority, and that has meant a core commitment to biblical inerrancy – that is the words of the Bible are written without error.” That may be hard for some of us to understand and thus easy to dismiss – but we are called to respect others...and live out that respect to all. Respect doesn't mean agreement but it also doesn't mean outright dismissal of what is possible. Consider the advancements already made. And as the

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<sup>2</sup> Time, January 26, 2015, pages 45-48.

authors of this story said, This movement toward acceptance of marriage equality is a youth-led revolution...with “a new breed of young activists who are re-examining their attitudes and beliefs about LGBT people... One of the sources from which our living tradition is based in is the direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life; and it is from the human experience, across the generations that love knows no societal barrier – neither class, race, gender...Love transcends all of that when hearts and minds are open and are seeking a larger connection with something, with another.

Love is not simply meant to be experienced between human beings – for many of us, I know have experienced a deep connection to and love animals who are our pets and companions. The adoration, loyalty and kindness our pets offer us – the protection and help they give to those in need – whether in their own species or beyond – those stories are at the least heart-warming and more than that, can be inspiring. And there are some of us here who have a kind of love for this planet that we call home...and are willing to act for its wellbeing. Many of us have chosen to educate ourselves, sacrifice and live differently so that others may live, so that we lighten the weight of our footprint in the use of the earth’s resources...and this type of love...this type of commitment is needed as the changes in our climate grow exponentially and the animal kingdom, especially in the oceans struggles to survive. Action is needed but the action is better accomplished when the work comes from the heart – out of love rather than judgment and self-righteousness. I know our Climate justice team is working to advance our knowledge about what actions we can take to make a difference. They are busy creating local partnerships with other organizations for we cannot do this work alone. I am glad for this kind of work; I recently saw an important documentary from the director of the Oscar-winning film *The Cove*...Louie C-ho-yos

has a new film – Racing Extinction and he explores the idea that humanity’s impact on the planet may in fact be creating the next great extinction our planet will experience. You can check out the link to more about this important documentary in our home page – Chris has put up the link for you. GIVE CHRIS C THE LINK FOR OUR HOMEPAGE.

And this work is important and yet in the midst of our social advances in recognizing love in multiple kinds of couples, in rescuing animals and easing our carbon footprint for a healthier planet and the slowing of species extinction...in the midst of all of this, I have to wonder what is it all worth if we cannot look upon one another, black and white, immigrant and native, law enforcer and youth of color who are often deemed guilty before proven innocent, rich and poor and all the other labels and ways of being we use to separate and isolate ourselves from one another, if we cannot look upon one another as brothers and sisters of one human race; if we cannot mature beyond the stereotypes and narrow thinking, if we cannot see beyond the established systems of oppression that hurt all of us in known and unknown ways and see the lies of separateness and racism, if we cannot find our way through fear of diversity, thinking that difference must mean less than, then all of our work is at best limited and at worse, useless and will come to naught and we will have wasted the precious gift of life.

As we heard earlier this morning in the readings – Love is the only way through...love is the only solution, love is the answer and the only antidote to fear and hate. This kind of love is not found in websites or dating services, not in Hollywood or Hallmark. The kind of love that will help us grow beyond the fear and cast out hate is the kind of love that requires strength...it’s the kind of love that requires some acts of bravery...some allies willing to speak up...this kind of love requires self awareness and a willingness to do the hard work we do to see there is no “Other” when it comes to people and freedom, people and equal treatment under the law, when it

comes to the human race – there is no Other, no less than, no not equal to; this is the kind love that is needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century if we, as a people and a planet are going to survive and thrive. It's the kind of love that the Rev. Dr. King describes in his book strength to love...for in all of his work, from working for civil rights to ending the war to trying to work against poverty and create jobs, in all of his work he understood that love was the defining action and ideal we needed for our lives to have any meaning and worth. It is love that served as the central element in Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence...his belief in a divine, loving presence that binds all life.<sup>3</sup> "...the wellspring for the eradication of even these most economically, politically and socially entrenched evils is the moral imperative of love. ...When I speak of love," he said, "I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response. I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality. ...Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate. This can only be done by projecting the ethic of love to the center of our lives."<sup>4</sup>

So how do we do this? What does projecting love to the center of our lives look like? It starts by not being afraid; it starts by speaking your truth...by listening to others' truth and finding some common ground. It starts by opening our minds and educating ourselves about the reality that exists in all of our neighborhoods in San Diego. My friends, love is a verb...love brings healing, wholeness, kindness and more light into the world. Love is about actions that allow for more freedom – more expression that lifts up life, it doesn't downgrade it. What does love look like in the center of our lives? When love is at the center we can become patient, kind,

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<sup>3</sup> strength to love, Dr. King in the forward, page ix.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pages x and xi.

humble, we will not relish in another's pain but seek to correct it and give comfort...love celebrates life; ...

Our reflection question asks – how will you demonstrate the power of love today? what will that look like? will it be reaching out to another for healing and reconciliation ? will it be putting down the second donut and instead practicing some self love in the way of taking a walk instead? will it mean speaking up for those who need an ally...and doing the work of what being an ally is...which is educating ourselves, speaking up when asked, being self aware enough to know what privilege is and what it isn't and then acting on that knowledge...how will you demonstrate the power of love today? Our Universalist ancestors remind us that the holy, the divine, the Spirit of Life, God – the ultimate – the strongest power in the universe is a force we call Love and it exists and is strengthened when we reach out to another. It is important to remember that Dr. King did not just preach the power of love to only certain people...only white people in power...in one of his most significant statements he said about love, he directed it toward African Americans on a Sunday morning. There they were, gathered in that sanctuary, when he delivered this sermon, written in the Georgia jails, talking to his people who had worked, marched, been threatened and maybe were doubting about what was to come – to that congregation he told them, “There will be no permanent solution to the race problem until oppressed men develop the capacity to love their enemies. The darkness of racial injustice will be dispelled only by the light of forgiving love. For more than three centuries, he said, American Negroes have been battered by the iron rod of oppression, frustrated by day and bewildered by night by unbearable injustice, and burdened with the ugly weight of discrimination. Forced to live with these shameful conditions, we are tempted to become bitter and to retaliate with a corresponding hate. But if this happens, the new order we seek will be little more than a

duplicate of the old order. We must in strength and humility meet hate with love. ...Of course this is not practical...my friends, we have followed the so-called practical way for too long a time now and it has led inexorably to deeper confusion and chaos. Time is cluttered with the wreckage of communities that surrendered to hatred and violence. For the salvation of our nation and the salvation of mankind (humankind) we must follow another way. While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community.” Dr. King understood that the beloved community recognizes the humanness of the oppressed as well as the oppressor. And if this man, who suffered so much, could say these words to a people who were tormented, terrorized and suffered with him – if this man, not a supernatural being, if he could say these words and find ways to live them out, so can we. May it be so.