

UUSS Sunday Service  
May 3, 2020  
Big Love  
Rev Lucy Bunch, homily

About two years ago in my newsletter column I shared a reflection on these words by Martin Luther King:

"I have decided to stick with Love. For I know that Love is ultimately the only answer to [humankind's] problems, and I'm going to talk about it everywhere I go."

This quote caught my eye on a Facebook post but more importantly it caught my heart. It caught me up in its sincerity, its almost innocent intention. It could have been written by a child- but it was written by one of the greatest leaders of the 20th century, a man who endured much and sacrificed everything.

In that column from July 2018 I talked about how I was changing the signature on the birthday cards we send to members and friends from "warm regards" to "sending love." At the time it felt like a big risk – who was I to send love to everyone even if was just on a card? I felt shy.

I am less shy about it now. I am "sending love" in as many ways as I can. And it feels good. But in these times it doesn't feel like enough. I have been reflecting on deeper and broader ways to put love into action.

Many of us are familiar with some of the Greek Dimensions of love – particularly Agape and Eros. Eros is passionate love, while agape is universal love, more akin to altruism the unselfish concern for others. Jesus of Nazareth preached Agape - in his story of the Good Samaritan, he preached of how a Samaritan – a person of a different faith than Jews, helped a Jewish man who had been beaten and robbed, while others passed him by. We often refer to those who practice altruist acts as Good Samaritans.

I love those stories, but Agape always seemed mild to m. Eros on the other hand, passionate love seemed more animated – obviously so when used to describe romantic love.

Clearly I was stuck in an either/or rather than a both/and. Martin Luther King practiced – agape – the altruistic love for humankind, but he did it with passion, with Eros, with commitment and conviction.

Unitarian Universalists are all in with love. Our justice ministries are grounded in love: UUA justice ministry Side with love and described as a public advocacy campaign that seeks to harness love's power to stop oppression. As UUs we say love is stronger than hate, love is stronger than fear. Some of our covenants say – “We affirm that love is our greatest purpose” or “Love is the doctrine of this church.” Love conquers all.

I am interested in the verb form of Love, love as force as transformation, as action.

Big love, world sized love, beyond the greeting on a birthday card, and the individual. Love that motivates and commits. It is exciting and intimidating. A big step from signing love on a birthday card. One of my minister's when I was a lay person did a sermon series called Loving the World with your arms wide open. I thought this was a great idea, but I was not sure how to get started. I learned an easy way is lovingkindness meditation. We have done this together in services - start with yourself or even yourself as a child and wish yourself health and wellbeing. Then add those close to you, the next circle and the next until you feel love for all beings. An excellent practice. A good start.

Some of you may have read my story about the supermarket encounter in my message last Tuesday. I was at the checkout counter, and the couple behind me in line were way too close to the checker, just standing there about 2 feet away. They had put their items on the little shelf next to the scanner. I asked them to please step back. At first, I think I was motivated by indignation. One of them said. “No Worries, we're good.” I said, “well actually there are worries, and you are not good, please step back to the red patch.” At that point I was thinking about the checker and how she had to deal with at least 100 people in her shift. She had on a mask and gloves, but this couple did not. The couple did not move. He said again, “we're good.” I replied – “I am not concerned about you; I am concerned about her - STEP BACK.” They reluctantly moved back.

As it happens in encounters like this, I did not plan what I was going to say or even think about it very much before I spoke up. I was quite emotional when I got back into the car, as the adrenaline the cleared out of my body. It just felt like the right thing to do.

But a few days later, when I was able to think more clearly, I was surprised to realize that I did it out of love. Love for the checker. Love for her commitment, or courage, or dedication, or whatever it took for her to show up and be there for me when I needed food. And reflecting on her made me realize how much love I feel for everyone who is stepping up at this time from the health care workers, to the restaurant workers, to all those risking their health out of commitment, all those suffering economic hardship. to those who are simply staying home. - all those making sacrifices on behalf of all beings.

I realized that this is the feeling of metta – love for all beings. Its Eros and agape all in one. It's the love expressed by our Mercy Peddlers when they go out to support the homeless, or our Environmental Justice Committee when they prod the county to hear the needs of the oppressed in Arden Arcade. Its not a glowly, feel good kind of love. In fact, it kind of hurts. It stretches you. But its powerful and motivating and rewarding. Big love.

In the poem we read earlier, the poet Lynn Ungar says

“reach out with your heart.

Know that we are connected

in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.

(You could hardly deny it now.)

Know that our lives

are in one another's hands.

(Surely, that has come clear.)

Do not reach out your hands.

Reach out your heart.

Reach out your words.

Reach out all the tendrils

of compassion that move, invisibly,

where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—

for better or for worse,

in sickness and in health,

so long as we all shall live.”

I do not want to romanticize this – its hard to love this way, wide open, fully engaged. To Love what is beautiful and what's broken. To love the whole damn interdependent web. I believe this is the kind of commitment we need to move us through this time into the possibility of what could be.

Like Martin Luther King, I believe that “Love is ultimately the only answer to [humankind's] problems. I choose love and I'm going to talk about it wherever I go.”

Blessed Be