

LOVE WINS!
The Rev. Julie Stoneberg
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
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OPENING WORDS ~ *Angela Herrera (slightly adapted)*

Don't leave your broken heart at the door: bring it to the altar of life.
Don't leave your anger behind; it has high standards, and the world needs vision.
Bring them with you, and your joy and your passion.
Bring your loving and your courage and your conviction.
Bring your need for healing and your powers to heal.
There is work to do; and all that we need to do it is here.
So let us come in and then reach beyond the walls of this [community.]
Let us fill this sanctuary with love and then harness its power to stop oppression.
Let us join together in worship and together let us stand on the side of love.

STORY FOR ALL AGES *Olive My Love* ~ *Vivian Walsh*

(A big red heart arrives on her doorstep, and Olive goes on an adventure to return it to the friend who lost it.)

RESPONSIVE READING *Open Our Hearts With Love* ~ *Naomi King*

When the world's violence shatters the joy of a moment
We pause and reach out for the hands that remain
 We open our hearts with love.
When despair rises as a monster from the deep and drags down one of our own, our
answer is that
 We open our hearts with love.
When hatred and anger rage in fire and suffering
We bend to pick up the wounded, to bind up ourselves and
 We open our hearts with love.
When fear whispers "build more gates" "add more locks" "the blessed are those who
defend themselves," we rock those fears to sleep and let them rest as
 We open our hearts with love.
People will do unspeakably cruel and horrible things; we know this fact, we live and
die this fact daily, all around the world, in every community and every wasteland. But
we know the answer is found only with one action, and so
 We open our hearts with love.
Hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love alone can be healed. This is the truth we
affirm. We live with courage and with a wider and wider circle of that force that bends
our lives to ones of mercy, justice, and compassion.

We open our hearts with love.
It's the truth: just by being born you are loved. There is something within you and every person that can be loved.

We open our hearts with love.
In love, we pray for those families, those individuals, all the persons here and everywhere who are desperately sure that there is not enough love in the world for them to have some, who are desperately sure that they do not matter.
In love with life, in love with the Beloved, we turn to answer that desperation with assurance: you are loved, you are loveable, we will and do love you.
Now, attend to your life's work: to love. It's the only legacy that matters. Amen.

MESSAGE *Taking Love Out for a Drive*

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

These words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., were likely first spoken in a sermon delivered in 1957. The biblical text he used for that sermon was one of his favourites...that is, the passage that contains an admonition to love our enemies. He began that sermon with these words:

"In the 5th chapter of the gospel as recorded by St. Matthew, we read these very arresting words, flowing from the lips of our lord and master. 'Ye have heard that it has been said, thou shall love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, that ye may be the children of your father, which is in heaven.'"

Dr. King was speaking at a very specific time in history, and out of a very specific, however far-reaching context...America, in the late 1950's, as a black man and a Christian. Some of his focus in this particular sermon was on Russia, and communism, and he was comfortable speaking of both as 'enemies'...comfortable using a language of war and battle as he spoke of the struggle between the forces of love and hate.

Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you.

In order to even consider what this same passage might offer...if anything...to us...in Canada, in 2016, to a liberal faith community, many of us privileged and powerful as part of the mainstream culture...to even consider if this bit of old text calling us to love our enemies has ANYTHING to say to us...we may have to determine which pew we are sitting in. Are we in the right or in the not so right? Are we the oppressed or the oppressor? Are we the winner or the loser? Are we the ones who hate or the ones who are hated? Are we the ones who love or the ones who need love to be shown to them?

The theme for Peterborough PRIDE this year is “Love Wins.” Personal disclaimer: I don’t like it. Oh, it’s not that I don’t long for love to prevail, for love to be the dominant force in our world, but there is something about the language of ‘winning’ that doesn’t sit right with me. You see, I don’t believe that love is oppositional in any way. Rather, love flows. Love eases. Love makes possible. Love sustains. Love energizes. Love connects.

For now, let’s set aside any idea of battle, of winners and losers, of enemies. Let’s just say that we want for there to be more love in the world. In that same sermon, King said that the reason not to hate is that “hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe.” He might as well have said that the reason to love is to intensify the existence of love and good in the universe. And it is this that I would like to focus on today...for if love is the only thing that drives out hatred, then we have got to take love out for a drive!

Yep, we have got to polish it up, back it out of whatever garage it is sitting in, and take love out onto the streets! Imagine that for just a moment. You have got love sitting in your car port. What does it look like? A red convertible? A 1965 mustang? A Smart car or hybrid? A sleek Cadillac? A trusty Subaru wagon? Whatever your ‘love bug,’ it is a joy for you drive...but maybe for just that reason you don’t take it out too often. I mean, nobody wants to get into a love fender bender! We wouldn’t want to wear thin our love tires!

But really, back it out and drive it around. Take that big heart of yours and strap it on the roof, or throw it in the back seat, and hit the road. Imagine tooling down the street and watch how the world changes just because of your presence. You roll down the windows and wave. People on the sidewalks stop and smile. The road becomes smooth and the lights all turn green. What was a black and white world turns to colour...

I have no doubt that to some extent this actually happens when we take love out for a drive, right out in public. And yet...driving that love car isn’t so easy, not when there’s so much hate, so much fear.

Dr. King, in that same sermon, offered three things that he thought would help us to love more. He prefaces his instructions by talking about ‘those people’ we don’t like, for whatever reason. Now remember that he is speaking to, I assume, a primarily black congregation in a highly racialized society. He tells them, and us, that first, in order to love, before criticizing the plank in another’s eye, we must first take the splinter out of our own eye. Imagine saying that when talking to some of the most oppressed people in society.

The number two piece of advice he offers is to work to see that bit of good in those we despise, “to look deep within them and see the image of god, and then you can love in spite of what [they do],” he says. Again, remember who King is talking to. In the language of the day, he is suggesting to a congregation of negroes that they search for the image of god in those who are persecuting them.

Finally, he says, in order to love those who we hate, that when the opportunity presents itself to defeat that enemy, to choose instead love for the person. Seek to defeat the system of hatred, he says, but love the person.

What do these words have to say to us on PRIDE Sunday, almost 60 years after they were spoken? Today, we would hesitate to tell the victims of homophobia that it is their job to do the loving. And, what do I have to say on this PRIDE Sunday, when I am not part of the LGBTQ community, to you, most of whom are also not part of the LGBTQ community? How do we, queer and straight together, come to an understanding about what it means to take love out for a drive?

Maybe what I'm stumbling on is that not every situation is the same. Not matter who we are, we don't always sit in the same pew or appear to need to hear the same message. Sometimes we are the oppressed and sometimes we are the oppressor. In some situations, we are at the center and in others we are on the margins. Sometimes we have been hurt and sometimes we are the one who did the hurting.

And we have to balance that reality with the fact that today, we are living in a society where LGBTQ people are still actually persecuted...where the ways in which they might be seen as different are used as reasons for hatred and violence, exclusion and ridicule. Their reality, their daily experiences, cannot truly be known or understood by those of us who do not share that identity. And it is first to you who are queer allies, to whom I direct this admonition. Take love out for a drive. Join those who are risking their lives every day on the roads. Never mind that someone else who has a bigger faster car is not doing their share. Never mind that the road is full of hate-mobiles. Never mind that your car might suffer a few dents and scratches. Take love out for a drive. Get it out there.

I think that we liberal beings have a tendency to turn what hatred we have toward those who aren't 'as enlightened' as we are...toward those who are part of the systems that we seek to dismantle...toward 'those people' who are causing the problems we would seek to solve. 'They' don't get it. If only 'they' would change, the world would be better. Well. Maybe we are still sitting in those 1957 pews listening to Dr. King speak of love.

Let us look to ourselves. For indeed we are the only beings that we have the power to change. In order to love better, and to ensure that there is more love and good in the universe, then we have to look to ourselves. And so, I return to Dr. King's list about how to more fully love.

First, we must tend to the splinters in our own eyes. Yes, there are huge injustices out there. There are planks and I-beams and telephone poles and towering trees of injustice and hatred out there. But...there are also splinters in our own eyes, making it impossible for us to see clearly. One of those splinters is our tendency to deny our prejudices and to defend our insensitive words or actions. How about, when faced with a hurt we have caused, we respond with humility. "I'm sorry. You're right. I cannot know how you feel nor can I completely

understand your reality. I was unaware. Thank you for helping me to see more clearly." Take love out for a drive by seeking to understand the other and to see our own roadblocks to love.

Second, try to see the good in those we hate...or in those who have shown hate toward us...or in those with whom we disagree...or in those whose lifestyle we don't understand. Find in them some measure of the image of god. Why? To absolve them? To condone their actions? To offer forgiveness? To move toward agreement with them? To become their friend? No. Look for the good in them because love is the only thing that drives out hate. Because love transforms hearts and people. Because there is something in love that has a power to change us, and to change those to whom we extend that love. Love is creative. Love builds us all up.

Finally, King's advice is to seek to defeat the system, not the person...that even when the opportunity presents itself to defeat our enemies, we should choose to walk through that victory with love, addressing the systems of oppression and hatred, but still loving all involved. We must choose love, King says, because when we hate anybody, it destroys our own creative center, our own vital energy.

Geez it's hard. Choosing love. Choosing love even when we are being mistreated or when we see others being hurt and oppressed. It's counter-intuitive. The idea of retributive justice has been bred into us...that we should get, and give, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But that, as Gandhi so famously said, only makes the whole world blind. An eye for an eye, hate for hate, may be fair, but it will not result in the world we so desire.

Steven Levine, in his beautiful poem *If Prayer Would Do It*, writes:

If prayer would do it
I'd pray.

If reading esteemed thinkers would do it
I'd be halfway through the Patriarchs.

If discourse would do it
I'd be sitting with His Holiness
every moment he was free.

If contemplation would do it
I'd have translated the Periodic Table
to hermit poems, converting
matter to spirit.

If even fighting would do it
I'd already be a blackbelt.

If anything other than love could do it
I've done it already
and left the hardest for last.

To love is the hardest thing. To love in spite of, to love in return for, to love without cause...to love when it seems impossible. It's the hardest thing. And it's what we are called to do...no matter which pew we are sitting in.

Cornell West, a modern day King, has said, "Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public." If West is right, justice comes into being when we love, and when we love right out there in public. On the streets. Justice for all happens when we increase the love until it drives out all of the hate.

Does love win? If indeed love wins, then there is no one or nothing that loses. And love wins when we take our love out into public...singing and flying and driving...out into our neighbourhoods, out on the streets, and offering it to all we meet.

Come on, my friends. Let's go!

Amen.

CLOSING WORDS

~ Buddhist Prayer of Peace

May we become at all times, both now and forever

Protectors for those without protection

Guide for those who have lost their way

Ship for those with oceans to cross

Bridges for those with rivers to cross

A sanctuary for those in danger

A lamp for those without light

A place of refuge for those who lack shelter

And servants to all in need.

Let us take love out for a drive on the freeway of life!

AMEN!