

2021 02 14 – Love Transforms

Mark 9:2-9 (The Inclusive Bible)

One of my favourite movies is based on the story of Cinderella. The movie ends with the servant girl and her prince in a romantic pose in front of an open window in the castle. She says, “You sir, are supposed to be charming,” and he replies, “We, princess, are supposed to live happily ever after.” Cinderella jokingly asks, “Says who?” and her prince admits, “I don’t know!” I have to confess, I am a sucker for romantic comedies with fairy tale endings. They allow me to retreat into a fictional world where: love is easy and endings are always happy.

But then I have to return to the real world. A world where the “myth of romantic love” is, according to Scott Peck, “a dreadful lie.” Dr. Peck says, “as a psychiatrist I weep in my heart almost daily for the ghastly confusion and suffering that this myth fosters” (*The Road Less Travelled*, page 92). Romantic love may initially bring us together, but it is not the basis for a lasting relationship.

What I’ve just shared with you is the beginning of a reflection that I often use for weddings. I thought it was appropriate for Valentine’s Day, a day when love is celebrated all over the world. A day that was created to perpetuate the myth of romantic love. A day that can bring heartbreak to those who find themselves alone or lonely.

In reality, there are many types of love and today I want to focus, not on romantic love, but on agape love, God’s love. A love that is universal, unconditional, and everlasting. A perfect love that is available to each and everyone one of us. A

transformative love that we too often ignore, avoid or resist.

In today's scripture reading we find Jesus on top of a mountain with three of his disciples: Peter, James and John. Then, all of sudden, Jesus begins to change. His clothes become an unearthly brilliant white. Then, the vision becomes even stranger, as two of the ancient prophets, Moses and Elijah, appear and begin talking to him. The disciples watch in terror and amazement wondering what on earth is happening. Peter, trying to make sense of what he is seeing, remembers a story from the ancient prophets that connects an event like this one with the building of small shelters and blurts out an offer to create dwellings for the three apparitions. (<http://www.davidlose.net/2015/02/transfiguration-b/>)

But in doing so, Peter comes very close to missing an encounter with agape, with Divine Love, with God. Just as he stops speaking, a cloud overshadows them, and from the cloud there comes a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" It is as if God is saying, "Be in this moment. You don't have to explain it or fix it. You just need to be open to it, to experience it." Peter and James and John are being asked to take in the wonder and the mystery of Divine Love manifest in this vision on the mountain.

How often have we reacted like Peter? Yes, we all desperately want an encounter with God – some sense that we are not alone – and yet in those very moments when Divine Love draws near we find ourselves, like Peter, afraid, unsure, and feeling suddenly very out of control and so we try to explain it away, put it in some familiar box or even ignore it.

We do this because we are afraid, afraid of what agape, Divine Love can do, afraid of being changed or transformed. Romantic love is exciting and fun and easy but it doesn't last. God's love, on the other hand, is unconditional and everlasting and, when we allow it to, it will change us. When we accept God's Love and return it, we will be transformed. And, as we all know, transformation, the creation of something new, is never easy, it takes patience, strength and courage.

Valerie Kaur, in her new book, *See No Stranger*, uses the metaphor of labour, of giving birth, to describe the process of transformation, the creation of something new. She writes:

The midwife arrived and said she could see the baby's head, but all I could feel was a ring of fire. My muscles pushed down, but I was resisting and pulled the little body stuck in the ring back into me. There was only one way out and that was to go through—I had to push into the fire.

The midwife said, "Breath and push."

I turned to my mother and said, "I can't"

My mother whispered in my ear... "You are brave," she said. "You are brave." I didn't believe her. Just then I saw my grandmother standing behind my mother—and her mother behind her, and her mother behind her, and her mother behind her, a long line of women who had pushed through the fire before me, disappearing into the distant horizon.

(*See No Stranger*, page 276-277)

Valerie Kaur sums up this metaphor by saying, ““Love is more than a rush of feeling. Love is sweet labour—fierce, bloody, imperfect, and life-giving. A choice we make over and over again.” (See *No Stranger*, page 278)

Peter, James and John had no way of knowing what was in store for them as they made their choice to love God and to follow Jesus. A couple standing at the altar on their wedding day, has no idea where their vows of love will lead them. And neither do we. All we can know is that every time we accept Divine Love and allow it to change us then we are moving just that much closer to our true selves, to who we are meant to be. Every time we are filled with the power of agape, then we are being transfigured, transformed, and recreated for God’s work in this world.

And just as Jesus and his disciples climbed a mountain to be apart, we need to make space in our lives for meaningful encounters with the Divine. Just as married couples need to take time to cultivate their relationship, we need to develop our connection with God. Being here, together on a Sunday is one way that we take time for God. But we also need to make space for encounters with the Divine during the rest of our week. Even if it’s just a few minutes of deep breathing between our daily tasks or prayers before bed or a meditative walk at lunch hour. Like any other relationship, our connection to the Divine takes time to make it work.

When we create that time, then God’s love will be there to comfort us and to fill us with the patience, the strength and the courage we need to be transformed, to

push into the fire and to create something needed, something new within ourselves and within this world. So be it. Amen.