

Sermon Love Is the Absence of Judgment

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“Love is the Absence of Judgment.”

What was your first notion, your first interpretation of what that meant?

What do you think that means?

This is a test, a personality test: the cynic or the idealist.

Do you have an inner Dalai Lama, or an inner Dorothy Parker?

“By the time you swear you're his,

[Shivering and sighing.]

And he vows his passion is,

[Infinite, undying.]

Lady make note of this --

One of you is lying.”

— Dorothy Parker

Is the absence of judgment foolishness or compassion?

Are we careful or careless?

Do we live by doubt or do we live by love?

Cynics live safe lives; they don't worry about whether they are loved (of course not).

They don't worry about whether they'll be betrayed, or disappointed (of course they will).

As long as their expectations are low, they'll be satisfied.

Should we run a background check on someone we're dating? Or hiring?

Should we get the used car we're buying from a friend inspected?

Should we give money to the beggar?

Should we let our teenagers party without checking in on them?

Lots of us would answer yes, hell yes, no and hell no.

Are we careful or careless?

This defines our lives, every day.

It defines how we are in the world.

It may or not be how we want to be in the world.

Sometimes we look at what we've done and say to ourselves:

“that is my human nature, or, that is my divine nature.”

Actually, when I first read that poem by Alice Walker,

I imagined our divine natures like that seam of gold, of love,

waiting for the light, waiting to be struck;

something underneath it all, steadfast and secure.

If you think our divine natures are meant to make us closer to perfect, think again.

Perfect does not mean right every time.

That golden streak of divinity does not mean right every time.

Living a perfect life does not mean
anticipating every risk, every hurt;
immune from all frailty and tragedy
never doing wrong, never having wrong done to you.

We are human, and that streak of the divine in every one of us
does not mean we have the capacity for perfection.
Perfection is in the eye of the beholder.
It is defined by time and place and style and philosophy.

Jesus was not accounted perfect in his time.
He was radical and confusing.

About every other year, Valentine's Day comes during the season of Lent,
and I'm exercising a little theology on you in light of that fact.
Because Jesus' trial and sorrow
are just what cynics want desperately to avoid.
We can't understand Jesus unless we understand his humanity
and the whole concept of steadfast love.

Rev. Bruce Clary introduced me to the humanity of Jesus, and to what happens when we take the
humanity out of Jesus.

Quote from "Foggy Jesus" (p. 58, Views from the Iceberg: Selected Writings of Bruce Clary)

Quote from "The Uninvited Christ" (p.59, Ibid)

What is the first act of faith – to know how we are cherished;
how we are loved – however you understand faith,
however you recognize evidence of love.
Whether it is Jesus on the Cross,
or Pharaoh's chariots mired in mud,
or the first crocus,
or a baby's goofy smile,
or an exultation of larks,
or a new day dawning,
or deliverance from evil and relief of pain;
the first act of faith is to recognize how we are loved.
And not just any love, but the kind that gets us through all that life throws at us, and that we throw at
life.

To get there is hard, isn't it, especially if you're not sure, or your convictions led you astray.

What is the second act of faith – to show how we love.
To not be afraid to show love, mercy, justice and forgiveness.

There is this notion of steadfast love/lovingkindness, Chesed, that permeates the Hebrew Bible and the
New Testament. Jesus embodied Chesed.

Our humanity makes us want to be immune from life: from all risk, all embarrassment, all hurt, all frailty. Take that to extremes and we can become cynics. We think that wisdom is all about protecting ourselves, but we are not meant to be protected. We are meant to learn.

“Remember, you cannot be both young and wise. Young people who pretend to be wise to the ways of the world are mostly just cynics. Cynicism masquerades as wisdom, but it is the farthest thing from it. Because cynics don’t learn anything. Because cynicism is a self-imposed blindness, a rejection of the world because we are afraid it will hurt us or disappoint us. Cynics always say no. But saying “yes” begins things. Saying “yes” is how things grow. Saying “yes” leads to knowledge. “Yes” is for young people. So for as long as you have the strength to, say “yes’.”

— Stephen Colbert

What is the first act of faith – to know how we are loved. To hear yes.

What is the second act of faith – to show how we love. To *say* yes.

There is a process in front of us; a process of moving from safety and survival to something greater; a world in which we know we can rely on one another to thrive.

Ultimately we won’t get to that world until we can be a little foolish, until we can build a structure that will allow us to be a little more moral, a little more humane, a little more trusting.

May it be so.