

Making Love Sermon February 13-14, 2010 by The Rev. Jan O'Neil, St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, Creve Coeur, MO.
Based on RCL: Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:21; Luke 9:28-43a.

Happy Valentine's (Eve). How do you like your valentines? Syrupy sweet? Funny? Suggestive? X-rated? PG? Many of us depend on Hallmark to come up with the right words for our beloved—for all those we love. Hallmark presents us many choices. If an official day dedicated to “love” helps us to think about what it means to care for, and to yearn for a response, so be it.

Relationships take work. Psychologists remind us that “love” is about revealing the very core of ourselves, our being. What is deep inside our fleshy hearts that has been wounded, healed, bruised and massaged may be harder to share these days than to reveal our bodies. From the earthy to the holy let's look first at stories about ourselves and, second, the greatest love story of all—from our loving God—the Old and New Testaments' stories of God's revelation.

First, from me. Last week I flew on two airplanes. I don't know how it is for you, but when I board a plane these days, I feel much too physically close to the people next to me, (and in front and back of me for that matter)... There's just no room. I get self conscious as I reach for the seat belt between our seats and am worried I might actually touch the person, or give any indication that I might want to strike up a conversation of sorts. I usually quickly get out my book, bury my face and hope that the person next to me doesn't ask me a question about where I'm going, etc., which might lead to a conversation and stuff I don't really want to talk about a stranger about. I don't want to reveal much at all. I don't initiate and I try to withdraw. Aloof, maybe, but at least somewhat understandable, with strangers.

Unfortunately, the same self absorptions can happen with those I love the most and who aren't strangers at all. I can miss the daily valentine messages given by family and friends.

And then there is God. My airplane story could be about avoiding time with God instead of a fellow-traveler squished in an airplane seat. God is all around me, yet I can get very busy when I feel God's presence, I don't always take the time to listen, to be affected by the unconditional love that is offered to me. I can withdraw into my book, into doing the dishes, into just being busy. And I can miss the God that is almost tapping me on the shoulder, asking me if I need comfort, courage, help. I'm deaf and blind. I don't hear God say, I love you, Jan. Another simple valentine missed. God's revealing to me can go unanswered.

Our lessons today have a theme of God's revealing to us God's powerful love. In our scriptures we find stories telling of God reaching out to us over hundreds of years, about a loving God longing to touch us, to be understood and loved back, and we humans just don't get it. That's what the veil is about in our lessons. We pull veils over our faces.

Throughout salvation history God is constantly present in stories of love being revealed (unveiled) for us. God makes God's self known through relationships. — Not through knowing facts about God, but knowing God in relationship. In our first lesson today from Exodus Moses is “shining” after his encounters with God. God's love is powerful: Moses is forever transformed visibly by his interactions with God. The prophet Elijah, too, had a mountaintop encounter with God that is alluded to in Luke. In the Gospel today we view Jesus on the mountain dazzling white after his encounter with God in the cloud revealing Jesus as God's son who is to be listened to and followed. The disciples are so enamored that they want to stay there with Jesus and build tents for him and for Moses and Elijah.—but staying secluded is not what knowing God is all about. Jesus soon descends into the town casting out demons from the boy, making room for God's spirit and bringing healing and wholeness.... The disciples are happy to stay on the mountaintop, basking in God's love and being with Jesus. But Jesus' work is in the trenches. And so is ours.

Jesus commissions us to be God's hearts, feet, and hands in this world. The dazzling transformation of Jesus **is** to his work in the trenches as God's love **is** to us and our work in the world.

Here we are thousands of years later. Happy Heart Day. What are the basics? God is love? (Maybe too common.) God the Lover? (Too abstract). Let's make the theological, fleshy. How about a verb of action: God making love to us. God is love in action in a very intimate way.

I know Hallmark likes Valentine's, but I think God might too. The God I know loves fun, connections in community, friendships and revelations of love, caring, and compassion. God loves us first. That's a fact. That love is freely given. God's best valentine to us is the incarnation of God's love bringing Jesus among us here on earth. Now, God invites and longs for our response because love is a two way street... God does not coerce a response from us (love doesn't force); it is our choice to risk responding from the depths of our fleshy hearts, when we take seriously being transformed by God's love and pouring that love back out into the world. When we take in God's love and gift it to others, we are changed, we have the opportunity for transformation—even if we don't have shiny faces or our clothes aren't dazzling white.

Life is lived in the trenches...in response to God's love. We can't stop! God needs us to do God's work in the world, to see Christ's face in each person to be co-creators with God. Enveloped in God's love we are empowered to help others, to be conduits for God's love in response to God making love to each of us. We, in turn, make love to the world. If truly transformed, transfigured we can truly do nothing else. So here's where the valentines come in. Just as Jesus' healing the boy flowed from God's love in the gospel story, so our valentines give us a concrete way to talk about how what we do flows from God's love. The valentines are on the pews—one for everyone.

The Outreach committee is asking you to tell us what outreach you do here and elsewhere: at your child's school; disaster relief; hammer and nails; rice bagging; boiling

eggs; stray animals; taking meals to the sick; Lui; serving on boards? What are your passions to harness and pours back into the world? Preparing food or tax returns, holding babies, tutoring, mentoring, writing grants, fighting racism, sending notes? What are your dreams for what St. Timothy's could do as a community? What would you like us to consider? The sky's the limit~ Please risk and reveal your response on the hearts in the pews. Then push-pin them to the Valentine boxes in the gathering space or on the bulletin board Love in Action. **Declare your love!** Don't keep it secret. Maybe you'll give someone else a good idea.

God makes love to us: God sends us Jesus.

Somehow, a quick, "Hey, God, love you, too," lacks a heartfelt response.

Rather, God begs, me, you: "Make love to my broken world. Now. Together."

Love in action. Amen.