



EXPLORATION

Love

Readings



1. *The Non-Sense*

by Rev. Gordon McKeeman

We are lovers, we say “Yes” to each other. “Yes” to life—to more and more of life—to its brevity, its grief, its disappointments. To its possibilities, its magnificence, its glory. We quarrel—because we glimpse further possibilities, the non-sense—and wish to lay claim to it. We remember death, and that life is brief, and that the time for love is now and more is possible. One more step toward the holy. It is to know the peace that passes understanding, and that there is no peace. It is to love others as they are, warts and all, and to believe that more is possible and to bespeak that wanting. It is to pray “Give us this day our daily bread...” And to know that we do not live by bread alone. It is to remember death, and to love life and to accept them both as holy.

Source: Berry Street Essay, 1993

2. *Humans’ Core Function Is Love*

by adrienne maree brown

When we are engaged in acts of love, we humans are at our best and most resilient. The love in romance that makes us want to be better people, the love of children that makes us change our whole lives to meet their needs, the love of family that makes us drop everything to take care of them, the love of community that makes us work tirelessly with broken hearts.

Perhaps humans’ core function is

love. Love leads us to observe in a much deeper way than any other emotion....

If love were the central practice of a new generation of organizers and spiritual leaders, it would have a massive impact... If the goal was to increase the love, rather than winning or dominating a constant opponent, I think we could actually imagine liberation from constant oppression. We would suddenly be seeing everything we do, everyone we meet, not through the tactical eyes of war, but through eyes of love.

We would see that there’s no such thing as a blank canvas, an empty land or a new idea—but everywhere there is complex, ancient, fertile ground full of potential....

We would understand that the strength of our movement is in the strength of our relationships, which could only be measured by their depth. Scaling up would mean going deeper, being more vulnerable and more empathetic....

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/humans-core-function-love>

3. *A Love Letter*

by Courtney A. Walsh

Dear Human,

You've got it all wrong. You didn't come here to master unconditional love. This is where you came from and where you'll return.

You came here to learn personal love. Universal love. Messy love. Sweaty Love. Crazy love. Broken love. Whole love. Infused with divinity. Lived through the grace of stumbling. Demonstrated through the beauty of... messing up. Often.

You didn't come here to be perfect, you already are. You came here to be gorgeously human. Flawed and fabulous. And rising again into remembering.

But unconditional love? Stop telling that story. Love in truth doesn't need any adjectives. It doesn't require modifi-

ers. It doesn't require the condition of perfection.

It only asks you to show up. And do your best. That you stay present and feel fully. That you shine and fly and laugh and cry and hurt and heal and fall and get back up and play and work and live and die as YOU.

It's enough. It's Plenty.

Source: *Dear Human: You Were Born to Be Real!* by Courtney A. Walsh

4. *The Path to Love*

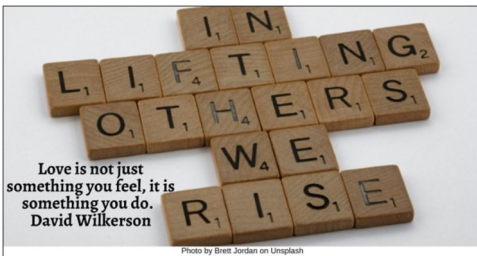
by Rev. Sam Trumbore

...Erich Fromm contrasts infantile love with mature love. “Infantile love follows the principle: ‘I love because I am loved.’ Mature love: ‘I am loved because I love.’ Immature love says: ‘I love you because I need you.’ Mature love says: ‘I need you because I love you.’”

...Fromm sees mature love as an art having four characteristics: care, responsibility, respect and knowledge. The love of a mother for her child mirrors the first characteristic of care. This “love is the active concern for the life and the growth of that which we love.” The key word here is active. Care is evident in the doing. Care is closely allied with responsibility. ...Responsibility implies attentiveness to the needs of the other.

Fromm notes that responsibility is not enough since “it can easily deteriorate into domination and possessiveness, were it not for a third component of love, respect.” Respect honors the integrity of the other and the boundaries of the other. It sees the recipient of love as a whole person and not a thing to be controlled and manipulated. It honors the inherent worth and dignity of the other.

That respect of the other is conditional on the knowing of the other. Unless I am open to knowing who you are *at your most essential*, what your needs are, your passions are, your joys, fears and sorrows, I cannot fully respect you, be



responsive to you, or even care for you. To fully love you, I must know you, respect you, respond to you, and THEN care for you.

Source: <http://www.uumin.org/sam/sermons/Path-to-Love.pdf>

5. **Love First**

by Rev. Rebecca Ann Parker

Loving our neighbor implicates us in loving the whole network of life. ... We cannot turn from our bonds and obligations for and with one another and expect everyone to be okay. We cannot love after the fact and expect love to be able to save life. ...

We must learn again to live with reverence. Reverence is a form of love. ... Reverence greets all humanity as sacred. It genuflects before the splendor of the grass and the magnificence of the trees. It respects the complexity, beauty, and magnitude of creation and does not presume to undo its intricate miracles. ...

Reverence for life has to be learned. It is not just a feeling; it is a way of life.... Reverence involves full-fledged devotion enacted in deeds of care and responsibility. It involves knowledge, study, and attention. ...

Our task now is to do what we can to advance reverence for life and deepen the promise of love. Let us dedicate ourselves to the thinking, researching, practice, and learning that will bring more love into the world. Let us be a witness for the new science that tells us how connected all life is and let us work for social policies that embody our responsibility for one another and for the earth. Let us give reverent attention in our worship life and our educational work to knowing and serving the beauty and goodness of life. ... Let us make love the first—not the last—resort.

Source: *Blessing the World: What Can Save Us Now* edited by Robert Hardies. Boston: Skinner House. 2006

6. **Choose Love**

2 by Rev. Lisa Friedman

It is precisely because we live in a world which knows the evils of greed and violence and the seas of human indifference that we understand just how sacred it is when our acts of love and compassion actually triumph. And it is precisely because we live in a world which knows such triumphs that we cannot fully give up hope on our imperfect humanity.

...Love is a choice. Love is a stand. Whether we are ...by the bedside of a loved one dying, or ...by the side of a stranger we have only just met. ...The love which inspires the courage and commitment of such choices is not a sweet or sentimental kind of love. Rather it is a love which recognizes the greater good and the bonds of kinship of which we are a part.

...But once we accept love as a choice, then we must also come to terms with where that choice leads us. This was the profound and radical insight of our Universalist forbearers.... Love cannot be just for one, or some of us. If it is for any of us, it must be for all. Love cannot be just for those with loud voices, but also for the voiceless. Love cannot be just for those with power, but also for those who are marginalized. Love cannot be just for those who still hope, but also for those who despair that help and hope will ever come.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermon/151139.shtml>

7. **Love and Social Justice**

by Raoul Wieland

[bell] hooks writes that “*to truly love we must learn to mix various ingredients – care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust as well as honest and open communication.*”

Defining love, she writes that love “*is the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth. Love is as love does. Love is an act of will – namely both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We chose to love.*” Love, thus defined, makes it mutually exclusive with abuse. The two cannot co-exist. To know and keep love, she writes, we have to surrender the will to power.

In contrast to the humdrum of romantic love ...the only sustainable

foundation for a healthy civil society: a ‘love that does justice’.

Martin Luther King ...said that “*justice is love in calculation. Justice is love working against anything that stands against love. Standing beside love is always justice.*”

Michael Edwards... added that “*Love is the anchor or inward expression of social justice and justice is the outward expression of ‘love in calculation’ – a conscious design for remaking the world around a radically different rationality than self-interest. Deep transformations are possible if love and justice reinforce each other to create a permanent shift in direction among human beings and the institutions they create.*”

A ‘love that does justice’ combines an inclusive, empathetic, and self-reflective love with the practice of new forms of politics, economics and social activism to transform society.

Source: <https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/whats-love-got-history-love-social-justice-hesaid/>

Wisdom Story

Love the Dandelions,

a traditional Sufi story

Mullah Nasrudin decided to start a flower garden. He tilled the soil and planted the seeds of many beautiful flowers. When the flowers came up, however, they were accompanied by a nearly equal number of dandelions. He sought advice from gardeners all over Turkey, and tried all of their methods to get rid of the dandelions, but the dandelions persisted and continued to spread. Finally, he walked all the way to the Sultan’s palace to speak to the royal gardener. The royal gardener suggested many remedies to get rid of the dandelions, but Nasrudin had already tried them all. They sat together silently for some time. Finally, the royal gardener said to Nasrudin, “Well, I suggest you learn to love them.”

Source: <https://spiritualcuriosity.org/stories/story-dandelions/>

Snippets

“When I say it’s you I like, I’m talking about that part of you that knows that life is far more than anything you can

ever see or hear or touch. That deep part of you that allows you to stand for those things without which humankind cannot survive. Love that conquers hate, peace that rises triumphant over war, and justice that proves more powerful than greed.” *Fred Rogers*

“The Dalai Lama says that when we make a mistake, we need to ask, ‘Can I love this too?’ Can I love all of me, even the peevish parts? Even the insecure bits, the anxious bits? Because I can love my niece even when she sticks her hand in my cup of coffee and gets mad and hollers at me for it. It’s easy. I don’t expect her to be perfect. Can I extend that understanding to myself? Can I love my anxiety too? My depression too? My desire to seem like I have my shit together even when I’m freaking out? Can I love all of me?”

Rev. Kate Landis

... “Over the 20th and into the 21st centuries, thinkers within the black radical tradition—especially hooks, Cornel West and James Baldwin—have ... teased out love’s potential in politics. Liberal politicians and political theorists have toyed with love, too: ... Jimmy Carter called for government to be ‘filled with love’; ... Václav Havel envisioned a government that would ‘radiate love’; [and] ... Martha Nussbaum has written about ‘civic love,’ ...

... Love should ... be a virtue in, and an end-goal of, politics: this is what I mean by a ‘politics of love’. ... We should admire and encourage those who are motivated by love in their political practice (rather than being motivated by the ‘power and domination’ to which [bell] hooks refers), and who express love through political action.

... A radical politics of love is not passive. ... Justice must be done before love can be completely realized. And sometimes [love] ... requires anger, conflict and confrontational action.”

Max Harris

“[When] my daughter ... was ten, [she came] from school with a new assignment: ... to write an “I Have a Dream” speech. She practiced out loud, standing in the kitchen, passionate. In her speech there was a line about

gay and lesbian people as friends. In the middle of practicing, she looked up at me, a wave of recognition dawning on her face.

‘Mom, some of the kids in my class don’t believe this.’

‘I know, honey.’

‘Amanda says it’s against her religion.’

‘I know, honey. But our religion says we don’t leave people out. Our church welcomes people the way they are, whether it is a woman and a man, two men, two women, parent and child, friend and friend. God is Love, and God wants more love in the world not less.’

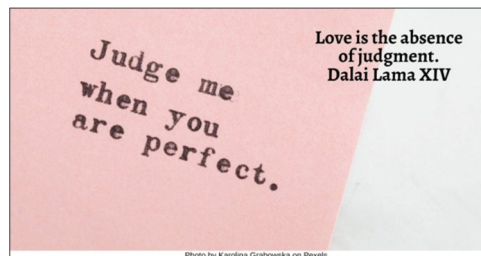
I watched her face as she took this in and turned away, practicing the words, thinking about what she would say to her friends at school.”

Rev. Jenny Rankin

“We are all prodigal sons, children of many ages who have failed our parents, our loved ones, our own expectations of how we thought we would turn out. We all have fallen short of who we long to be. We are not as dependable or loving or successful or witty as we would like. Still, we yearn to run into loving arms. We ache to be enfolded in a spiritual community that recognizes that even in our brokenness we are holy. Can we be that community for each other? Can we enfold other people in the way we long to be enfolded?” *Rev. Kate Landis*

“There are two basic motivating forces: fear and love. When we are afraid, we pull back from life. When we are in love, we open to all that life has to offer with passion, excitement, and acceptance. We need to learn to love ourselves first, in all our glory and our imperfections. If we cannot love ourselves, we cannot fully open to our ability to love others or our potential to create. Evolution and all hopes for a better world rest in the fearlessness and open-hearted vision of people who embrace life.” *John Lennon*

“Now there is a final reason I think that Jesus says, ‘Love your enemies.’ It is this: that love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. Just



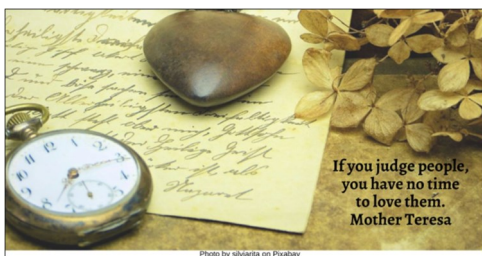
keep being friendly to that person. Just keep loving them, and they can’t stand it too long. Oh, they react in many ways in the beginning. They react with guilt feelings, and sometimes they’ll hate you a little more at that transition period, but just keep loving them. And by the power of your love they will break down under the load. That’s love, you see. It is redemptive, and this is why Jesus says love. There’s something about love that builds up and is creative. There is something about hate that tears down and is destructive. So, love your enemies.”

Martin Luther King Jr.

“The principal form that the work of love takes is attention. When we love another, we give him or her our attention; we attend to that person’s growth. When we love ourselves, we attend to our own growth. When we attend to someone, we are caring for that person. The act of attending requires that we make the effort to set aside our existing preoccupations and actively shift our consciousness. Attention is an act of will.” *M. Scott Peck*

“Love is made up of three unconditional properties in equal measure: 1. Acceptance. 2. Understanding. 3. Appreciation. Remove any one of the three and the triangle falls apart. Which, by the way, is something highly inadvisable. Think about it — do you really want to live in a world of only two dimensions? So, for the love of a triangle, please keep love whole.” *Vera Nazarian*

“Dogs are minor angels, and I don’t mean that facetiously. They love unconditionally, forgive immediately, are the truest of friends, willing to do anything that makes us happy, etcetera. If we attributed some of those qualities to a person, we would say they are special. If they had ALL of them, we would call them angelic. But because it’s “only” a dog, we dismiss them as sweet or funny



but little more. However, when you think about it, what are the things that we most like in another human being? Many times, those qualities are seen in our dogs every single day-- we're just so used to them that we pay no attention."

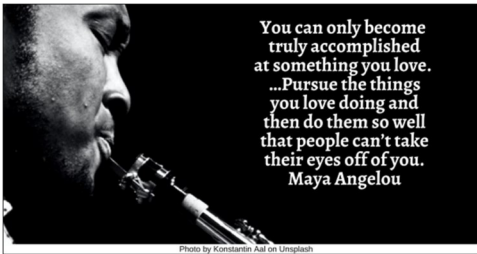
Jonathan Carroll

Questions

1. In reading #1, the Rev. Gordon McKeeman wrote that we are lovers who say "yes" to each other and to life. How have you said life "Yes" to life? He continued writing, "we glimpse further possibilities, the non-sense—and wish to lay claim to it." In what ways do we "sense" love? In what ways does love go beyond the senses to become the precious stuff of "non-sense?" In taking another step toward the holy, McKeeman wrote, "It is to love others as they are, warts and all, and to believe that more is possible and to bespeak that wanting." What is holy about love? What allows our love to become more expansive so that we can "love others as they are, warts and all?" He concluded, "It is to pray 'Give us this day our daily bread....' And to know that we do not live by bread alone. It is to remember death, and to love life and to accept them both as holy." Why might he have connected death and our love of life? How does death reveal the depth and breadth of love?
2. In reading #2, adrienne maree brown writes, "Perhaps humans' core function is love." Do you agree? Why or why not? What if we acted as if love was our core function? How would our lives and life change? What if everything we did as activists was done "not through the tactical eyes of war, but through eyes of love?" What would that mean? Martin Luther King Jr. put love at the center of his activism. How does doing so change the nature of activism?
3. In reading #3, Courtney Walsh rejects the idea of unconditional love. Do you agree? Why or why not? Is unconditional love possible? Necessary? Why is unconditional love placed on such a pedestal? She extends her point by writing, "Love in truth doesn't need any adjectives. ...It doesn't require the condition of perfection." Does love need to be perfect or "Lived through the grace of stumbling. Demonstrated through the beauty of... messing up? Which? Why?"
4. In reading #4, the Rev. Sam Trumbore discusses Erich Fromm's four characteristics of mature love: "care, responsibility, respect and knowledge." Do these make sense to you? Why or why not? Are there other characteristics you would add? What and why? Which of the four do you believe is the most important? Why? Trumbore concludes by reversing the order: "To fully love you, I must know you, respect you, respond to you, and THEN care for you." Is this how you want to be loved? Is this how you try to love? What happens if a step is skipped?
5. In reading #5, the Rev. Rebecca Ann Parker writes that to love our neighbor requires that we love "the whole network of life." Do you agree? Why or why not? She argues that reverence, a form of love, is an important ingredient in loving life. What does reverence mean to you? Why is it important? How would you connect reverence to love? Parker concludes, "Let us make love the first—not the last—resort." What changes could this change bring about?
6. In reading #6, the Rev. Lisa Friedman writes that it is sacred "when our acts of love and compassion actually triumph." Can you give examples of such triumphs? She encourages us to choose love and to realize the consequences of that choice. Friedman writes, if love "is for any of us, it must be for all." Do you agree with her? Why or why not? How can we extend love to the voiceless, the marginalized, and those who despair? If our love is for all, how can we love those whom we regard as our enemy?
7. In reading #7, Raoul Wieland quotes bell hooks, Martin Luther King Jr. and activist and author Michael Edwards on the relationship between love and justice. Wieland writes, "the only sustainable foundation for a healthy civil society: a 'love that does justice.'" Do you agree? How does a healthy civil society relate to the common good? He concludes, "A 'love that does justice' combines an inclusive, empathetic, and self-reflective love with the practice of new forms of politics, economics and social activism to transform society." Do you agree? Why or why not? What does an inclusive, empathetic, self-reflective love require? What are some examples of that kind of love? How can we evoke that kind of love? In our congregations? In society?

The following questions are related to the Snippets

8. Instead of beginning with love, Fred Rogers started with liking. He began, "When I say it's you I like...." What are the things that you most like about the people you like? What are the things that you love about the people you love? What is also important in this is what is meant by "you." Rogers wrote that "you," was the "deep part of you that allows you to stand for those things without which humankind cannot survive." What is the deep part that you like in people? That you love in people?
9. The Rev. Kate Landis writes, "The Dalai Lama says that when we make a mistake, we need to ask, 'Can I love this too?'" This leads to the question, "Can I love all of me?" How would you answer this question? What is the value of loving every part of us? What makes it difficult to do? What are the downsides when we fail to do so? How does this failure affect how we re-



You can only become truly accomplished at something you love. ...Pursue the things you love doing and then do them so well that people can't take their eyes off of you.
Maya Angelou

Photo by Konstantin Aul on Unsplash

gard others? Does rejecting some parts of who we are cause us to be more judgmental of others? Which do you choose, being perfect or good enough? Why?

- 8 Max Harris focuses on the potential of love in politics? Does this seem improbable to you? Why or why not? He elaborates writing, "Love should ...be a *virtue* in, and an *end-goal* of, politics...." Do you agree? Why or why not? He asks that we honor those who "express love through political action." What people come to mine who did this? Why is it important to honor them? Harris concludes, "Justice must be done before love can be completely realized." Is this true? Why or why not? How do you connect love and justice?
- 9 The Rev. Jenny Rankin shares a conversation that she had with her ten-year-old daughter who was practicing her own *I Have a Dream* speech for school. Her speech included a line about having friends who were gay and lesbian, but she was worried that some classmates were not accepting. Have you encountered people who discriminate against members of the LGBTQIA+ community? How have you responded? How have you or can you Side with Love? How does it feel when you thought a fight for a cause was over only to realize that it has emerged again with a vengeance? In times like these, where do you find hope?
- 10 The Rev. Kate Landis writes that we are all prodigal sons given all that we have failed to do that we expected of ourselves and what others expected of us. Have you been a prodigal son or daughter? How were you treated in response? Have you been the parent of a prodigal son or daughter? Were you able to

respond with love, forgiveness, or generosity? If yes, what helped you to respond? If no, what got in the way? Landis writes that despite our failures, "we yearn to run into loving arms." Has that been true for you? In what way? Have you found loving arms? Whether yes or no, how were you affected? How can our congregations, as Landis asks, "recognize that even in our brokenness we are holy?" Is this capacity characteristic of a beloved community? Why or why not?

- 11 John Lennon wrote that we are motivated by fear or love. Do you agree? Why or why not? How has fear affected you? How has love impacted your fears? Stressing that we need to learn to love ourselves, he wrote, "If we cannot love ourselves, we cannot fully open to our ability to love others." Do you agree? Why or why not? Have you cultivated love of self? If yes, how? If no, why not? How does culture make it hard to cultivate self-love? Lennon concluded, "Evolution and all hopes for a better world rest in the fearlessness and open-hearted vision of people who embrace life." How might this be true?
- 12 Martin Luther King Jr. stressed the importance of loving your enemies. Do you agree with this command of Jesus? Why or why not? Our second source refers to the "transforming power of love." King believed that love could be redemptive, transformative. Do you agree? Why or why not? He wrote, "There's something about love that builds up and is creative. There is something about hate that tears down and is destructive." Can love counter hate? If yes, how? If not, why not? What are we to do with the hate we encounter?
- 13 M. Scott Peck wrote, "The principal form that the work of love takes is attention." First, is love work? Why or why not? Second, is attention

important to the work of love? Why or why not? How does a parent communicate love to a child by being attentive? How can inattention harm the bonds of love? Peck wrote that attention requires setting aside our preoccupations and shifting our consciousness. Does this mean that attention requires mindfulness? Why or why not? What has the attentiveness of others meant to you? Did it feel like love? Why or why not?

- 14 What, for you, are the properties or characteristics of love? Is one more important than another? Which? Why? Vera Nazarian writes, "Love is made up of three unconditional properties in equal measure: 1. Acceptance. 2. Understanding. 3. Appreciation." Do you agree that these are important? Why or why not? Are they of equal weight. If not, how would you rank them? Why? How do these compare with your list?
- 15 Jonathan Carroll praises the unconditional love that dogs give. Do you think that dogs love? Why or why not? Let's reverse it. What do you make of people who own and deeply love their pets? Is this true love? Why or why not? If you asked these pet lovers if their love was returned, how would they answer? How do pets enrich the lives of their owners? And what should we make of their grief we these beloved pets die? And what has died within those people who mistreat pets? Or people? Carroll calls dogs minor angels. How can the quality of our loving transform us into minor angels?



Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made, like bread; remade all the time, made new.
Ursula K. Le Guin

Photo by Viktor Hanaček on picjumbo