

Love Is Scary
Mark 10:15-52
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First Central Congregational UCC
18 March 2018

This Lent we have been “Practicing Passion.” On the first Sunday of this season, I quoted Kenda Creasy Dean describing “The burning desire to be engulfed by love, to be ignited by a purpose, to radiate light because the love of another shines within us.”

But that kind of passionate love is only possible for us if we are willing to take the risks. The risks of being vulnerable, of not being fully in control, of surrendering our selfishness, of trusting God and other people, of being willing to serve and sacrifice, of giving and forgiving.

Love is scary.

To follow in the way of Jesus is to follow the way of the cross. And many of Jesus’ followers are simply unable to take that risk. Something gets in their way. We might be like the young man whom scholar Herman Waetjen describes as “petrified and invulnerable, afraid to expose himself to the uncertainties and insecurities of the future,” and so walks away from Jesus.

Which is why we have to be like children. Repeatedly in the previous chapters of this Gospel and in the last three weeks of sermons we have preached, Jesus has talked about children as a model for what it means to follow God’s way. Scholar Herman Waetjen writes, “To receive God’s rule like a child depends on the qualities of vulnerability and trust, transparency and defenselessness, integrity and wholeness, expectation and humility.”

[Excursus on being loved by a child]

But we have lost that sort of trusting love, haven’t we? We’ve loved and lost. We’ve loved and had our hearts broken. We’ve loved and been hurt by the one we loved.

But just imagine if we could be healed of all that heartbreak and love again with childish trust and joy. Bartimaeus is like that. He follows Jesus with a wild abandon. Can we be like him?

One of the more intriguing books I’ve read in recent years was *The Great Divorce* by C. S. Lewis. I’ve long been a fan of Lewis because of the role that *The Chronicles of Narnia* played in shaping my imagination, theology, and spirituality since childhood.

But *The Great Divorce* is not an example of good fiction. It is too didactic and Lewis can get too polemical about the things that annoy him.

Yet, despite the novel’s flaws, it reveals a profound truth.

The novel imagines hell as a place drab and boring—no lakes of fire or pitchforks. And some of the residents of hell get to visit a midway point between their residence and heaven and some of the saints come down to engage with them and invite them into heaven. But most

resist. They are unwilling to surrender some part of themselves or refuse to trust or love or rejoice.

In Lewis's vision the only thing that separates one from true bliss is one's own refusal. One of his characters says "No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it."

Lewis's story clearly has implications for earthly existence. People unwilling to choose joy and love will not experience it. You must choose them. And you can't choose them on your own terms, you have to surrender yourself and your control and let love work its magic upon you.

So here's the good news:

The salvation God is offering us means we can get rid of our defensiveness, our cynicism, our negativity, our fear, our greed, our hatred, our violence, our despair, our hopelessness, our lack of trust, our sloth, our lack of grace.

And instead we can become creatures of freedom, joy, beauty, trust, integrity, wholeness, humility, generosity, faith, hope, and love.

Wow! Sign us up.

But between here and our joy lies the cross. The risk, the heartbreak, the pain.

In her book *Journeys By Heart*, theologian Rita Nakashima Brock teaches us that it is through this experience of pain and suffering that we develop resilience that connects us with others and find our power that "makes and sustains life".

So, what kind of love is truly powerful? The kind that loves like a child with wild abandon and trust and joy *after* the experiences of pain and heartbreak. The kind that knows love is scary and yet loves freely anyway. The kind that knows the risks and does not fear.

Take heart; get up, for Jesus is calling.