

# Seasons of Love

## Sermon by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan

February 25, 2024

Do you sometimes do things out of your comfort zone for people you love, because you love them? Maybe you've been the momma bear who stood up for children and what they needed, even when it was uncomfortable? Or the neighbor who said yes when others looked away? Perhaps you've followed an urge to help someone or a group of people, even though it felt illogical or overwhelming.

Love has a way of doing that. It nudges us toward what we know is right and holy and good. It is up to us to decide to listen.

I have wanted to deliver this sermon about the meaning of love for quite a while, but I resisted writing it because I didn't want to shortchange or do a disservice to Love's power and possibilities. Until my resistance to sharing these ideas came right up against my commitment to someone I care about deeply. I chose love.

Before I start, however, I need to say something to those of you who are doubting love, or who have never felt or known its power. I have been there too. And, if it is helpful, I invite you to borrow my love. Take as much as you need until you find your own.

My friend Polly was diagnosed with a serious illness a few months ago. Polly has been encouraging me to write this sermon for years. "I promise I will read it," she said. "I'll keep it on my nightstand and read it just before I go to sleep."

It was time to write this sermon. It was love's season. I dedicate this sermon to Polly, to all of you, and to the mysterious, beautiful, bold, and subtle power called love.

These reflections are solely my understanding of love. You may or may not agree with what I say. I'm not asking them to be yours and I'm not proselytizing. Each of us has our own understanding and experiences of love. These are mine.

In her poem "I Feel Sorry for Jesus," Palestinian American poet Naomi Shihab Nye describes her frustration with people's blasphemous attributions to Jesus. Her feelings expressed in this poem

illustrate how I feel about people's too frequent denigration of love. Thus I share her poem as a way into my reflections on love which will follow.

### I Feel Sorry for Jesus

People won't leave Him alone.  
I know He said, *wherever two or more  
are gathered in my name...*  
but I'll bet some days He regrets it.

Cozily they tell you what He wants  
and doesn't want  
as if they just got an e-mail.  
Remember "Telephone," that pass-it-on game  
where the message changed dramatically  
by the time it rounded the circle?  
Well.

People blame terrible pieties on Jesus.

They want to be his special pet.  
Jesus deserves better.  
I think He's been exhausted  
for a very long time.

He went *into the desert*, friends.  
He didn't go into the pomp.  
He didn't go into  
the golden chandeliers

and say, *the truth tastes better here*.  
See? I'm talking like I know.  
It's dangerous talking for Jesus.  
You get carried away almost immediately.

I stood in the spot where He was born.  
I closed my eyes where He died and didn't die.  
Every twist of the Via Dolorosa  
was written on my skin.

And that makes me feel like being silent  
for Him, you know? A secret pouch  
of listening. You won't hear me  
mention this again.

I feel about love the way the poet feels about Jesus. (Actually, I share her feelings about him too.)

Here are some of things I hear about love. *It doesn't work. Love is a cliché. Love is soft, meaningless. There are problems to be dealt with*

# Seasons of Love

February 25, 2024 *page 2*

*in the world. If love is so powerful why are there wars?*

I ask: Has love really been tried? What kind of love are you referring to? How do you define it?

Love saved my life.

Let me just start there. The love I'm talking about wasn't given by a parent, grandparent, or romantic partner. Those people fell short in one way or another as all people do at some point. That kind of love is a gift, but it isn't the only love, and it's not the kind that will save us. We must touch into *that* love ourselves.

Love as I understand and experience it is an energy, a power of good. We all have to make the decision to engage with it. This is always a choice, for unlike fear and violence, love will not overpower you.

We all have equal access to this power, though many people have lost that connection because of a culture that doesn't value that, or by being mistreated by a person, people, or a system.

I know that disconnection; I have lived it, and I know it can be healed.

Allow me, if you will, to share my letter to my dear friend Polly, answering her question, What is love?

*Dear Polly, friend of mine, and many others,  
Your smile is so bright, made more real by your deep dimples. Your optimism is present even while you know struggle, especially now that you know a different kind of pain.*

*Your light shines so bright it makes Hallmark look like CNN. I didn't believe it could be real at first.*

*So rare is this state of heart that you embody.*

*Over time I learned to believe it and trust that it is real.*

*Yet all the optimism and joy in the world does not make us immune from sickness, disease, and loss. (All the more reason to be joyful anyway!)*

*You've asked me for a long time, my friend, to write about my understanding of love.*

*The day I saw your beautiful smile waver was the day I knew it was time to speak my truth aloud, for you.*

*Because that's what love does.*

*Love enters into pain.*

*Love walks toward the places where too many people are afraid to go—the places where we feel the most alone and sometimes powerless.*

*Love holds space.*

*It holds memories if and until we are ready to remember.*

*Love is an ever-present energy we must choose, for fear, cynicism, and greed are always waiting by its side.*

*Love is relational. It is an exchange within ourselves, between two or more people or animals, and between people, animals, and the Earth. Love is experienced in the exchange between us and everything we value, including inanimate objects, musical instruments, or a favorite chair on the summer dock.*

*Love protects, even as it connects and ends isolation. It moves at our speed.*

*Love is beautiful, nowhere more poignant than when love is felt in the hardest of times. Beautiful love is when we cry and don't give a damn how we look. It is when we sob angry sobs, and our eyes are blood red. Beautiful love is when we call and ask for help. Beautiful love is when turn to another and say, "I see you" and mean it.*

*Love always moves toward the next right action. If we keep following it day by day it will lead us to the flowing river, the wellspring that bends toward unity, compassion, and truth.*

*Love is brave even as it is humble. It shows its strength in the places where intellect and heart intertwine. Brave love is vulnerability, truth telling, and daring to take a risk.*

*At the same time, love is paradoxical and mysterious. It is never changing and ever changing, personal and universal.*

*Love speaks all languages, even curse words and silence. Perhaps especially those.*

# Seasons of Love

February 25, 2024 page 3

*Oh, and love laughs, belly laughs and quiet laughs. Sometimes it laughs and cries at the same time.*

*Love has an uncanny ability to know where the need is and to go there.*

*Love is accessible regardless of physical distance because love knows no boundaries; it is much larger than that.*

*Above all, dear One, as you sit where you are today, know that love is eternal. It never ends with death. Love lives on and on and on even in its changing form.*

*Love. Its circles are everywhere, through all the seasons of our life.*

*I love you, Polly.*

What blocks us from choosing love? Resentment, fear, loneliness, wounds from abuses of power that you inflicted or received. Does habit keep love out or do we keep it out trying to be safe?

The other thing that can close us down to love is loss. This is something less talked about but so important. There is nothing like the feelings we experience when we lose someone we love, whether through a long or sudden death. It can feel like a wasteland even as your refrigerator is overflowing with casseroles from friends.

When someone we care about is hurting, changing, growing old, or losing some abilities, the loss can be agonizing.

This agony generally stems from our guilt. *I shouldn't feel this way. We've been together so many years. He's my father or she's my mother.* With thoughts like these we cut ourselves off from self-compassion and grace. We expect ourselves to be grateful rather than grieving. Let's recognize that we can grieve the losses even as we also love this person more than words can say.

Change brings loss and loss brings grief. When we don't grieve well we have no choice but to suppress it or move away from anyone or anything that may touch that grief.

How many people are dying inside, longing for a friendly smile or hug, and yet too closed off to admit it? How many of us take these people for their word, or even worse, mistake their defenses

for the truth?

We all love, my friends. We all love, and we all grieve. And we all heal, and we all need love. Forgiveness is one important part of this opening to love. Forgiveness is not easy, and it is not something you do or don't do. Most of us forgive a little, but not everything. That's okay. Sometimes you wake up one day to realize there is nothing more to forgive, and sometimes you don't.

"Say 'I love you' before they die," says FRS member Ken Kretsch.

Love is a choice, sometimes easy and often hard.

Love goes to where it hurts and invites connection. However, all parties must choose love in a relationship; it can't be one sided. In a group or country enough people must choose to love so that it starts a groundswell of caring, holding, and repairing what is broken, hearts and all.

Choose well my friends, with safe places and people. When it's unsafe to enter a space, relationship, or topic, stay away. Let others go into that pain with wisdom and boundaries themselves. Move at your own pace and drop comparisons or feelings of despair.

Life is a series of seasons of hope, connection, and meaning. Seasons that come and go and come again. Birth, growth, death, rebirth.

Whether you are ready for a journey or caring for a loved one who once cared for you, they're all seasons. Each of these seasons has unique challenges and gifts.

Saints or ascended masters live in union with the energy of Love all the time. We are not saints. We are simply living our lives and doing our best. But trust this: Every action of love you choose changes you and the recipient if they are willing. It just may change the world.

Start by picking one quality of love. Move toward the pain, be brave, speak the truth, hold space for someone, and see how love responds.

May ours be a place where love grows.

May your seasons be seasons of love.

Amen.