


Order of Service  
*Enlightening Your Relationships*  
February 14, 2010



**Call to Worship and Chalice Lighting**

Once more we are together  
To heed our common calling,  
To build the community of our dreams,  
And to stand as a beacon  
Of justice, tolerance, and love.  
Let us worship together.

**Story for All Ages**

Rev. Bruce Davis

In 270 A.D., marriage had been outlawed by the emperor of Rome, Claudius II. Claudius issued this decree because he thought that married men made bad soldiers since they were reluctant to be torn away from their families in the case of war. Claudius had also outlawed Christianity in this time period because he wished to be praised as the one supreme god, the Emperor of Rome. Valentine was the bishop of Interamna during this period of oppression. Valentine thought that the decrees of Rome were wrong. He believed that people should be free to love God and to marry. Valentine invited the young couples of the area to come to him. When they came, Valentine secretly performed services of matrimony and united the couples.

Valentine was eventually caught and was brought before the emperor. The emperor saw that Valentine had conviction and drive that was unsurpassed among his men. Claudius tried and tried to persuade Valentine to leave Christianity, serve the Roman empire and the Roman gods. In exchange, Claudius would pardon him and make him one of his allies. St. Valentine held to his faith and did not renounce Christ. Because of this, the emperor sentenced him to a three-part execution. First, Valentine would be beaten, then stoned, and then finally, decapitated. Valentine died on February 14th, 270 A.D.

While in prison, waiting for his sentence to be carried out, Valentine fell in love with the jailer's daughter, the blind Asterius. During the course of Valentine's prison stay, a miracle occurred and Asterius regained her sight. Valentine sent her a final farewell note. He signed his last note, "From Your Valentine." Even today, this message remains as the motto for our Valentine's Day celebrations.

**Reading** "The Privileged Lovers," by Rumi

The moon has become a dancer  
At this festival of love.  
This dance of light,  
This sacred blessing.  
This divine love,  
Beckons us  
To a world beyond  
Only lovers can see  
With their eyes of fiery passion.

They are the chosen ones  
Who have surrendered.  
Once they were particles of light  
Now they are the radiant sun.  
They have left behind the world of deceitful games.  
They are the privileged lovers  
Who create a new world  
With their eyes of fiery passion.

## Testament

Donna Witte

It's Valentine's Day. So, I will now define romantic love!

How about Love is a Drug?

- More than a metaphor, being in love really does cause a drug-induced euphoria when "love crazed" endorphins flood the brain with a "feel good" rush. But we eventually suffer a rebound effect when the drug wears off and to quote from a Jackson Browne song: "your perfect lover just looks like a perfect fool".

Or do we go with the Soul Mate idea?

- One perfect love in one perfect universe and how amazing to have found each other! Really? I'm a little too cynical for that concept.

Or we could examine the Psychological Shadow.

- The need to "marry our mother or father" so we can continue to heal the psychic wounds of childhood...unbeknownst to each other, of course.

Or could love be a connection to our Best Friend?

- Someone who knows us better than we know ourselves and always has our back, until they don't....

As for me. All of the above.

I fell into infatuation at 17 with the high school quarterback, star pitcher, straight-A student, and all around cool guy. I wore his class ring and told my girlfriends this was a wonderful insurance policy because he would at least have to see me one more time to get his ring back if he ever decided to break up with me. Thus began (in my pre-feminist years) our first lifetime together.

We eventually married, that boy and I. And before long I resented his seeming perfection, his perceived judgments, his ability to ignore my very considerable need to be reassured almost constantly of my desirability and worth. For goodness sakes, he was acting just like my mother!!!

So we entered the rough seas of our second lifetime together... joined in a perfect storm of immaturity, curiosity, exploration, a year-long separation, and the general craziness of the 1970's...most of which I remember through a fog...but I know it was a time of great turmoil, some regret, and in retrospect, gratitude.

Once that craziness was past, I was relieved when I realized we'd weathered the storms of societal and psychological upheavals and were still standing. Side by side. Soul Mates! I was so glad the hard part was over!

Then we had a baby. Then another. He had a demanding career. I was a stay at home mom trying to figure out what my identity was. We had a big house and a big mortgage.

We made commitments to committees... saving the world from nuclear holocaust, reforming the education system, electing a slew of Democrats.

We moved through a spiritual quest that took us from Lutheranism, to Congregationalism, to Unitarian Universalism with side trips to several other isms.

We discovered a form of personal growth work that led us to involvement in men's and women's circles that may have saved our marriage and our lives... and which took a lot of our time and energy.

I found a career, we faced the challenges of teenagers, and cared for aging parents.

Thus, our third lifetime together was a blur of years that caught us up in a cyclonic swirl of busyness, exhaustion, joy, grief, and the nearly non-stop seeking of some sort of peace.

Did we remain Soul Mates through all of this? What is a Soul Mate anyway? At times we barely saw each other!

And then there is now -- a transition time. Children grown and almost launched, careers mostly behind us, downsizing the big house on the horizon...we even went to the RV show the other day. We are discovering who we are all over again.

And what about love? I've learned that the magic of "love" is no easy parlor trick. Love is listening, supporting, forgiving, paying attention and just being there. It is being open to change, setting aside defensiveness and ego, talking until understanding dawns, and never losing sight of the other as a person of value, worth, and dignity.

So today I reflect on the daily mutual commitment that has resulted in the many lifetimes I share with my partner...

...filled with gratitude for the infatuation that brought us together, for the psychological growth that helped us know who are, separately and together, for the best friend who reminds me who I am when I lose my way, and for the soul who has joined with mine on this particular path in this particular life.

**Sermon** Enlightening Your Relationships Rev. Bruce Davis (2335-271)

There is this notion that life as we know it can get better, fuller, richer, and more joyful. The wisdom traditions of the world offer encouragement and spiritual practices toward the manifestation of a better life. When we talk about a path of personal and spiritual growth, we declare our commitment to learning.

I remember fondly, with my generation, Joni Mitchell's song that was written in honor of the historic Woodstock gathering in August, 1969.

Maybe it's the time of year  
Yes, and maybe it's the time of man  
And I don't know who I am  
But life is for learning.  
We are stardust  
We are golden  
And we've go to get ourselves  
Back to the Garden.

Central to our life learning is our growing ability to be in loving relationship with those who are close to us. For myself, 1969 was characterized by remarkable immaturity as I tried to build a lasting relationship out of my first significant romantic encounter. The story of my experience would bore you to tears, but the *qualities* of immaturity that I brought into that relationship are pretty universal in our culture.

Erich Fromm, author of the classic text, *The Art of Loving*, suggests that as love matures there is a shift in the focus of our felt need.

Immature love says, 'I love you because I need you.'

Mature love says: 'I need you because I love you.'

In my earliest relationship, Fromm was right on. I *needed* the ego boost that this beautiful, smart woman provided, just by being the one who was with me. I *needed* this partner for the exploration of my sexual desires. I *needed* someone with whom to try to make sense of a complex and often overwhelming world. All that *need* came together in a package that I called *love*. I'm not criticizing my experience here. Frankly, given my immaturity at the time, it was all the love that I was able to bring to a significant other. After seven years of happiness and pain, in about equal measure, the partnership ceased. And yet I was not without seven years of growing up, of maturing in my ability to love, of learning.

As the first blush of romance fades, what are we left with? Those whose addiction is to jump from relationship to relationship, to taste again and again the nectar of new love, would say that the romance fades to nothing at all. Of course this is not true. We all know examples of partnerships and friendships in which a deeper quality of love begins to emerge over the decades.

I know couples whose joy is a long walk together, holding hand in hand. Who enjoy talking with each other about almost anything. Who provide support for each other's life interests. Who are constantly learning from each other.

Do you remember the play, *Our Town*, by Thornton Wilder? George Gibbs is courting Emily Webb. They are wonderfully yet painfully naïve in their immature love early in the play. On the day before their marriage the immaturity of their love explodes into anxiety, and the young people confide their fears with

their parents. After the young people have settled down, George's father and mother have a quiet moment:

Dr. Gibbs: Julia, do you know one of the things I was scared of when I married you?

Mrs. Gibbs: Oh, go along with you!

Dr. Gibbs: I was afraid we wouldn't have material for conversation more'n'd last us a few weeks. I was afraid we'd run out, and eat our meals in silence...

What they discovered, as happens with the maturing of love, is that all the little things become the basis for the continuing love story. The need has changed. Somehow, simply *being with the beloved* has replaced the urgency of desire and ego gratification.

Another huge learning came out of that early romance, and it's a lesson that I must keep learning, decade-by-decade, in all of my relationships. In that early romance, we came to depend on each other in a complex and confining way. She depended on me for emotional support. I, in turn, depended on her depending on me. She needed the support, and I needed her needing me. Likewise, I depended on her for intimacy, as if I had no access to intimacy other than through her. And she, in turn, needed me to need her for that. This is dependency in lock-down. Neither partner can move. The technical term for this relational mess is "co-dependency." I am locked in a dance with her needs and she is locked into a dance with mine. In the context of immature relationships, what we call love is often comes down to co-dependency.

It takes rising awareness to see the co-dependent patterns and break free from them. The antidote to co-dependency is freedom. If that freedom cannot be found in the context of the relationship, then it must be attained by freeing oneself from that relationship. This is why it *can* even be healthy for both parties in a relationship that is not working to separate for a time, or even permanently. If a relationship must come to an end, as my first marriage did decades ago, if we are lucky, we will take the learning and the personal maturation with us so that we can avoid the co-dependency next time around.

It takes life experience to enlighten our relationships, but it takes more than that, as well. It takes intention. It takes practice. It takes commitment. It takes patience. It takes making better choices. Whether we are talking about a romantic relationship, a friendship, a life partnership, or all of the above, there are seven key principles that will lead us to more fulfilling connections with those who are most significant in our lives.

1. *My relationships are based on equality.* This does not mean that we are the same height or can carry the same weight on our backs. We are neither above nor below each other. We are both uniquely created and can acknowledge those differences without a threat to the ego. Equality here is at the deepest human level, where soul meets soul. I delight in the fact that you at essence are a slightly different flavor and form from myself, and yet we can say “Namaste,” meaning that the spirit within me greets itself where it resides also in you.
2. *My relationships are mirrors of myself.* When I look at another person, whether friend or enemy, what I see says more about me than it does about them. If I see some courage in a Ghandi, it’s because some of that courage is in me. Otherwise I wouldn’t recognize it. If I see some violence in Mel Gibson’s religious conservatism, then that violence is also in myself. Those we love reveal to us our loving nature, and those we hate reveal our hateful qualities. This shadow of ourselves is always part of who we are, but we usually can only see it indirectly. Committed friendships and partnerships are huge opportunities to keep growing spiritually. The gifts and shortcomings we discover in each other become encouragements to become more deeply self-aware.
3. *My relationships make room for change.* On the individual level, enlightenment is said to be the move from the conflict of contradictions to the freedom of paradox. In this sense, spiritual growth is about accepting differences in one’s life rather than trying to erase those differences. This is a profound principle of diversity that is essential as a relationship deepens and matures. You are not only as you uniquely are and must be—you are dynamic and will surely change, day to day and year to year. Same’s true for me. If we would be in a committed friendship or partnership, the container of our relationship must always be ready to

assimilate the miraculous as it emerges in ever new ways in each other's life.

4. *In my relationships I let the past be the past.* Every time I call upon stories and images of my past, your past, or our past together, I weaken the present moment of our relationship now. "That affair you had five years ago is still gnawing at me. I still don't trust you." Just so, every time I get lost thinking about the future, I further weaken this present moment's experience. Ultimately if you and I can let go of what was before and what might eventually be, we learn to accept each other as we authentically are.
5. *In my relationships I choose being happy over being right.* So much strife happens in friendships and partnerships when one partner is always in competition with the other regarding the truth. Even it may be that one partner always takes a position that opposes the other's position. Getting tied in a knot about who's right takes us away from the simple contentment that we might experience together.
6. *I nurture my relationships through attention, Affection, time, and the sharing of wisdom.* Spiritualizing or enlightening a relationship takes practice. If together we embrace the practices of individual and mutual growth, the relationship will come closer to reaching its spiritual potential. Attention is that quality of noticing, of being awake to life and to each other. Affection means expressing the love you feel. Time means taking the time, even amid the busy-ness of your schedule and mine. Sharing wisdom means that we are both individually on our search for truth and meaning but with a wider intention that includes learning wisdom from each other.
7. *In my relationships I employ a skill-set of conscious communication.* Though there are lots of models for effective communication, the one I hope to feature here at Evergreen in the next couple of years is the Non-violent Communication model of Marshall Rosenberg. If I can learn and practice listening for your emotion and your underlying needs, and if you do that for me, we will provide for each other a venue for personal and spiritual growth. Furthermore, if we begin to hear each other's deeper

needs, like respect, tenderness, and connection, we may discover how much we can share with and provide for each other.

These seven principles comprise a spiritual practice of relationship. The result is a spiritualized or enlightened relationship characterized by a deep quality of surrender between both parties. Surrender in this sense does not mean giving up or giving in to the whims, possibly even destructive, of another human personality. It means identifying and relating from one's own spiritual depth, from one's own higher self, toward the other who is now known in light of their own spiritual depth and their own higher self.

The author and teacher Deepak Chopra puts it this way in his book, *The Path to Love*.

Spiritually, no action is more important than surrender. Surrender is the tenderest impulse of the heart, acting out of love to give whatever the beloved wants. Surrender is being alert to exactly what is happening now, not imposing expectations from the past. Surrender is faith that the power of love can accomplish anything, even when you cannot foresee the outcome of a situation.

But surrendering to another person's ego, even your beloved's, is not a spiritual act. There is a deeper, more mystical meaning to surrender. At the level of ego, two people cannot want exactly the same thing all the time. Yet at the level of spirit, they cannot help but want the same thing all the time. Your ego wants material things, predictable conclusions, continuity, security, and the prerogative to be right when others are wrong. By definition, pursuing these goals shuts out another person unless she falls in line with "my" agenda or he realizes that "I" am the important one around here.

Your spirit is not involved in such concerns. It wants being, love, freedom, and creative opportunities. This is an entirely different level of desire, and when you reach it you can share yourself with another person without conflict. Such sharing is the core of surrender.

Seeing into the soul of the beloved friend is to see Beauty itself. Talking meaning with the beloved friend is to encounter Wisdom. Serving justice with the beloved friend is to know the power of the Good. We become One in connection and purpose.

Poet e.e. cummings offers us this poem about transcendent love.

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in  
my heart) i am never without it (anywhere  
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done  
by only me is your doing, my darling)

i fear no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want  
no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)  
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant,  
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows  
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud  
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows  
higher than the soul can hope or mind can hide)  
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)

This is the quality of love that is possible when a relationship begins to experience its fullest potential. Co-dependency is replaced by a commitment to each other's freedom. Time together calls forth that mature need for the spiritualized love that is between you. Support is directed toward the other's own unique creative expression. We speak words of peace and compassion to each other, and we share the power of our sacred musings with our hurting world. Simple joys are enough, as when I walk with my friend or my beloved at the ocean beach or on a mountain trail. We surrender into something that is greater than ourselves and yet holds us together tenderly. You and I, present to each other, in the wider context of all Presence.

May it be so.