

“LOVE”
2-14-10
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TODAY IS VALENTINE’S DAY – OUR ANNUAL HOLIDAY DEDICATED TO THE CELEBRATION OF LOVE. IT IS A HOLIDAY THAT MAKES GREETING CARD COMPANIES, FLORISTS AND CANDY MAKERS VERY HAPPY – I SUSPECT THAT, EVEN IF WE’RE NOT, THEY ARE ALL “FEELING THE LOVE” THIS MORNING. MY GUESS IS THAT MOST PEOPLE DON’T KNOW THE ORIGIN OF THIS HOLIDAY, OR THEY WOULDN’T BE QUITE SO ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT PROMOTING IT. IT’S ACTUALLY A RATHER TWISTED AND DARK TALE OF CONSPIRACY, PERSECUTION AND MURDER. MAYBE THE HOLIDAY IS ACTUALLY GETTING MORE INTERESTING. VALENTINE’S DAY IS SYMBOLICALLY THE DAY THAT ST. VALENTINE WAS MARTYRED – BUT IN DOING A LITTLE RESEARCH, I DISCOVERED THAT THERE WAS MORE THAN ONE ST. VALENTINE IN HISTORY. IN FACT, IN THE EARLY YEARS OF ACE, MANY CHRISTIAN MARTYRS BORE THE NAME VALENTINE, SIMILAR TO HOW MANY POPES IN HISTORY HAVE THE SAME PAPAL NAME. BUT TWO VALENTINES SEEM TO HAVE MADE THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO THE CREATION OF THIS HOLIDAY. THERE WAS THE ST. VALENTINE OF ROME, WHO WAS ONE OF THE TWO MEN WHO MANAGED TO MAKE A FEW OTHER IMPORTANT MEN ANGRY ENOUGH TO RECEIVE A DEATH SENTENCE. THIS VALENTINE HAPPENED TO BE A PRIEST WHO WAS KILLED AROUND 269 ACE. TROUBLE STARTED WHEN THE ROMAN EMPEROR CLAUDIUS II FOUND OUT VALENTINE BELIEVED IN CHRISTIANITY AND NOT ROMAN PAGANISM, THE ACCEPTED RELIGION OF THE TIME. CLAUDIUS TOLD VALENTINE TO CONVERT TO THE PAGAN RELIGION, TO WHICH VALENTINE PROMPTLY REFUSED. HE THEN TRIED TO CONVERT THE EMPEROR TO CHRISTIANITY – WHICH REALLY ANGERED CLAUDIUS SO MUCH THAT HE HAD VALENTINE THROWN IN JAIL AND EVENTUALLY EXECUTED. THEN THERE IS THE SECOND VALENTINE, ST. VALENTINE OF TURNI, A BISHOP THAT FELL UNDER PERSECUTION AND WAS CONVICTED AND EXECUTED MUCH IN THE SAME MANNER. ALTHOUGH, NOT MUCH IS SAID OF THIS MARTYRED SAINT, HIS STORY ALSO DOES NOT CONTRIBUTE TO HOW THE HOLIDAY BECAME SYMBOLIC OF SENTIMENTAL LOVE. SO HOW DID THE STORIES OF THESE TWO ILL-FATED MEN COME TO REPRESENT ALL THIS LOVE BUSINESS THAT WE ASSOCIATE

WITH FEBRUARY THE 14TH? APPARENTLY THE LOVING PART OF VALENTINE’S DAY ACTUALLY HAS ITS ROOTS WITH A CLASSICAL WRITER. AND THAT IT’S A DAY THAT MARKED THE BEGINNING OF THE MATING SEASON FOR CERTAIN BIRDS. ALL OF YOU BIRD WATCHERS MIGHT WANT TO MAKE NOTE OF THIS. THIS RUMOR IS ALL THE FAULT OF GEOFFREY CHAUCER. IN HIS 1382 POEM, “THE PARLEMENT OF FOULES” – WHICH I READILY ADMIT I HAVE NEVER READ – CHAUCER MADE A REFERENCE TO TWO MATING BIRDS ON VALENTINE’S DAY. CHAUCER WAS ACTUALLY MAKING A METAPHOR FOR THE RECENT MARRIAGE OF KING RICHARD II TO ANNE OF BOHEMIA, AND WHEN HE MENTIONED VALENTINE’S DAY IN THE POEM, HE WAS NOT REFERRING TO FEBRUARY 14TH. HE WAS ACTUALLY TALKING ABOUT MAY 2, WHICH WAS NOT ONLY THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE YOUNG KING AND QUEEN, BUT WAS ALSO THE CELEBRATION OF YET ANOTHER, NON-MARTYRED VALENTINE, ST. VALENTINE OF GENOA. BUT – AND HERE’S A BIT OF TRIVIA FOR YOU – BECAUSE OF THAT POEM, WRITTEN IN 1382, THE TERM “LOVEBIRDS” WAS COINED AND IS STILL USED TO THIS VERY DAY. ACCORDING TO THE GREETING CARD ASSOCIATION, AN ESTIMATED ONE BILLION VALENTINE CARDS ARE SENT EACH YEAR, MAKING VALENTINE’S DAY THE SECOND LARGEST CARD-SENDING HOLIDAY OF THE YEAR. AND OF THAT ONE BILLION, APPROXIMATELY 85 PERCENT OF ALL VALENTINES ARE PURCHASED BY WOMEN. I LEAVE YOU TO DECIDE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THAT PIECE OF INFORMATION. WELL, REGARDLESS OF THE ORIGIN OF VALENTINE’S DAY – IT’S HERE AND IT IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR US TO REFLECT ON THE LARGEST ISSUE WE HUMANS STRUGGLE WITH FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE – LOVE. SO THIS MORNING, I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE A FEW STORIES OF LOVE – IN ALL ITS MANY FORMS. THE FIRST COMES IN THE WAY OF A CARTOON – HOW MANY OF YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH “FOR BETTER OR WORSE?” WELL, FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO DON’T KNOW THIS CARTOON IT FOLLOWS THE LIFE OF ONE FAMILY. A FEW YEARS AGO, ONE OF THE GRANDMOTHERS IN THE FAMILY DIED. THE GRANDFATHER THEN COMES TO LIVE WITH THEM. THIS PARTICULAR CARTOON SHOWS APRIL, THE YOUNGEST DAUGHTER, WATCHING HER MOTHER STARING AT PICTURES SHE HAS PULLED OUT OF AN OLD PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM. WHY ARE YOU TAKING PICTURES OF GRANDMA OUT OF THE PHOTO ALBUMS, MOM?” APRIL ASKS. “ITS VALENTINES DAY TOMORROWS, APRIL, SO I THOUGHT I’D MAKE A NICE DINNER

FOR US AND YOUR GRANDPA. AND I WANTED TO PUT SOME OF OUR FAVORITE PICTURES OF HER IN THE DINING ROOM.” “WON’T THAT MAKE HIM SAD?” APRIL ASKS. “A LITTLE, MAYBE. BUT JUST BECAUSE SOMEONE HAS GONE DOESN’T MEAN THAT YOU STOP LOVING OR REMEMBERING THEM ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS. AND WHEN WE LOOK AT THEIR PHOTOGRAPHS, WE GIVE THEM A HUG WITH OUR HEARTS...BECAUSE WE CAN’T GIVE THEM A HUG FOR REAL.” A LOVE CARTOON, IF YOU WILL. THAT CARTOON STORY LEADS ME TO THIS WONDERFUL STORY BY REV. ROBERT FULGHUM’S FROM HIS BOOK ENTITLED:, TRUE LOVE: STORIES. PERHAPS OUR MOST FAMOUS CONTEMPORARY UU MINISTER, REV. FULGHUM GAINED SUCCESS WITH HIS FIRST BOOK ENTITLED “EVERYTHING I EVER NEEDED TO KNOW, I LEARNED IN KINDERGARDEN.” THIS BOOK, TRUE LOVE: STORIES, WRITTEN IN 1998 IS QUITE DIFFERENT. HE WRITES: “IT WAS OVER FOUR YEARS AGO THAT I INVITED MY MOTHER FOR A VISIT – SHE LOVED TO TRAVEL – KNOWING THAT MY 83 YEAR OLD FATHER WOULD NO LONGER AGREE TO TRAVEL ANYWHERE. SHE DECLINED KINDLY, SAYING “NO, HE WOULD NEVER LEAVE ME.” IT WAS ONLY A FEW MONTHS LATER WHEN MY MOTHER WAS DEVASTATED BY A SEVERE STROKE, LEAVING HER PARALYZED, UNABLE TO SPEAK, NOT RESPONSIVE TO OUR QUESTIONS, BUT USUALLY AWARE OF MY SISTERS AND MY VISITS AND MOST ESPECIALLY OF MY DAD. SHE IS UNABLE TO IN ANY WAY CARE FOR HERSELF AND HAS BEEN IN A NURSING HOME EVER SINCE THE STROKE. AND SO HAS MY FATHER – NOT AS A RESIDENT THERE, BUT AS A DAILY, WITHOUT FAIL, VISITOR. MOST OF EVERY DAY HE IS THERE FEEDING HER, MASSAGING HER WASTED MUSCLES, READING TO HER, TELLING HER OF ANY NEWS FROM DISTANT FRIENDS AND FAMILY, GIVING HER BACK RUBS, SINGING LITTLE SONGS, SHOWING HER FAMILY PHOTO ALBUMS, WATCHING OVER HER IN EVERY WAY HE CAN TO HELP HER BE MORE COMFORTABLE. MY DAD IS 88 NOW AND HE HAS BECOME A LEGEND IN THE NURSING HOME BECAUSE OF HIS DEVOTION. HE HAS BEEN WITH MY MOTHER EVERY DAY SINCE THAT TERRIBLE EVENING THE NIGHT OF THEIR 59TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY. SHE KNOWS – YOU CAN TELL FROM THE WAY SHE LOOKS AT HIM – THAT HE WOULD NEVER LEAVE HER AS SHE WASN’T WILLING TO LEAVE HIM EITHER, EVEN FOR A SHORT FAMILY VISIT. “ A LOVE STORY. LOVE STRIKES US SOMETIMES WHEN WE ARE READY AND SOMETIMES NOT. THERE IS THE STORY OF JOHNNETTA COLE AND ART

ROBINSON. EIGHT YEAR OLD JOHNNETTA AND EIGHT YEAR OLD ART WERE INSEPARABLE. WHEN JOHNNETTA AND HER FAMILY MOVED OUT OF STATE, ART FELL TO HIS KNEES IN THE STREET AND SOBBED. FORTY YEARS LATER, HE DISCOVERED THAT HIS LONG AGO PLAYMATE HAD BEEN NAMED PRESIDENT OF SPELMAN COLLEGE. HE CONTACTED HER TO CONGRATULATE HER. NEITHER HAD EVER MARRIED. ONE CALL LED TO ANOTHER – THE LOVE THEY HAD EXPERIENCED AS EIGHT YEAR OLDS WAS STILL THERE - NOW THEY ARE MARRIED. A LOVE STORY. KATIE SHAPIRO HAD DECIDED AFTER GRADUATING FROM COLLEGE THAT IT WAS TIME TO LOOK FOR A NICE JEWISH GUY – IT WAS TIME TO SETTLE DOWN, MAKE HER PARENTS HAPPY, LIVE THE GOOD LIFE. AND SHE DID FALL IN LOVE, HEAD OVER HEELS IN LOVE, UNABLE TO DO ANYTHING BUT THINK ABOUT HOW IN LOVE SHE WAS. THE ONLY PROBLEM WAS THAT HER NEW LOVE WAS A WOMAN. THEIR LIFE TOGETHER HAS SOMETIMES BEEN DIFFICULT. SOMEONE PAINTED ON THE WINDSHIELD OF THEIR CAR “WE KILL HOMOSEXUALS AND WE’LL GET YOU TOO.” BUT KATIE AND HER PARTNER ARE BEST FRIENDS AS WELL AS LOVERS. THEY CHOSE LOVE OVER SAFETY AND SOCIETAL ACCEPTANCE. A LOVE STORY. MY FRIEND OF 58 YEARS – YES, WE STARTED FIRST GRADE TOGETHER – MARRIED HER HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEART AT 20 – HE 22. THEY HAD THREE CHILDREN AND NOW HAVE THREE GRANDCHILDREN. THEY HAVE HAD A STORY BOOK LIFE TOGETHER – THEY ARE THE COUPLE THAT BEAT THE ODDS AGAINST MARRYING SO YOUNG. BUT THIS PAST MONTH, MY FRIEND HAD TO COMMIT HER HUSBAND TO AN ALZHEIMER’S FACILITY BECAUSE SHE COULD NO LONGER CARE FOR HIM AT HOME. DIAGNOSED AT 60 WITH ALZHEIMER’S, HE NOW AT 67 HAS SLIPPED AWAY FROM HER AND HIS FAMILY AND FRIENDS. SHE VISITS EVERY DAY AND CONTINUES TO LOVE AND CARE FOR HIM, AS SHE HAS DONE FOR 45 YEARS. A LOVE STORY. JUST THIS PAST JANUARY 19, ERICH SEGAL, THE AUTHOR OF “LOVE STORY” DIED AT AGE 72. HIS LITTLE BOOK, HIGHLY CRITICIZED BY THE LITERARY COMMUNITY BECAME NOT ONLY A BEST SELLER BUT A VERY SUCCESSFUL MOVIE. IN 1970, LOVE STORY OPENED NATIONWIDE AND HAD AUDIENCES SOBBING ACROSS THE COUNTRY. THE STORY CHRONICLED THE LIFE OF STAR CROSSED LOVERS – THE WEALTHY OLIVER BARRETT IV, PLAYED BY RYAN O’NEAL AND THE WORKING CLASS JENNIFER CAVILLERI, PLAYED BY ALI MCGRAW. THEY MEET AS STUDENTS AT

HARVARD – MARRY OVER THE STRENUOUS OBJECTIONS OF OLIVER’S FAMILY – SHE DIES – HE CRIES – END OF STORY. ALTHOUGH NOT A LITERARY TRIUMPH, SEGAL WOULD TRY FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE TO WRITE A BOOK THAT WOULD GAIN THE RESPECT OF HIS COLLEAGUES – LOVE STORY RESONATED WITH PEOPLE. OLIVER’S OPENING WORDS: “WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT A 25 YEAR OLD GIRL WHO DIED? THAT SHE LOVED MOZART AND BACH. AND THE BEATLES AND ME.” TOUCHED THE HEARTS OF AMERICANS, YOUNG AND OLD. ANOTHER FAMOUS LINE FROM LOVE STORY ENDURES TO THIS VERY DAY - “LOVE MEANS NOT EVER HAVING TO SAY YOU’RE SORRY.” A NICE SENTIMENT, TO BE SURE, BUT FOR THOSE OF US WHO LOVE – HIGHLY UNLIKELY. LOVE GENERALLY MEANS SAYING “SORRY” A GOOD DEAL OF THE TIME. WHICH IS REALLY OK. FOR EVEN THE FAITHFULLY IN LOVE WILL NEED TO APOLOGIZE ON OCCASION FOR FAILING TO MEET THE EXPECTATIONS OF THEIR BELOVED. WE ARE, AFTER ALL, JUST HUMAN BEINGS. SO EVEN THE STORIES OF GREAT LOVERS ARE NOT PERFECT. MY FRIEND WHOSE HUSBAND HAS ALZHEIMERS WILL TELL YOU THAT THERE ARE DAYS THAT SHE WANTS IT TO BE OVER. SHE WANTS HIS PAIN AND HER PAIN TO END. SHE WANTS HER OLD LIFE BACK AND SHE IS ANGRY THAT THE GODS HAVE BEEN SO UNKIND. BUT BECAUSE SHE LOVES AND LOVES SO DEEPLY – THOSE FEELINGS PASS AND SHE GETS UP AND STARTS ANOTHER DAY – NEVER REALLY KNOWING WHERE IT IS GOING TO TAKE HER. AND SO THIS HOLIDAY OF VALENTINE’S DAY REMINDS US THAT LOVE IS THIS GREAT GIFT FROM THE UNIVERSE – AND LIKE MOST OF THE BOUNTY OF THE UNIVERSE, IT IS DISTRIBUTED UNEVENLY. IT MAY COME AT THE WRONG TIME. IT MAY ARRIVE IN WHAT IS CLEARLY THE WRONG PERSON. IT MAY NEVER COME AT ALL. BUT WHEN THE RIGHT PERSON AND THE RIGHT TIME COINCIDE, IT IS JUST ABOUT THE BEST THING THAT CAN HAPPEN TO US. AS NATURAL AS IT IS TO FALL IN LOVE, LOVING ONE ANOTHER FOR A LIFE TIME, LIVING TOGETHER, CLEANING AND COOKING, DOING LAUNDRY AND RAISING CHILDREN, PURSUING CAREERS AND EVEN CHOOSING WHERE TO GO ON VACATION TOGETHER ARE NOT. JUST AS WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO LIVE WITH ONE ANOTHER ON THIS PLANET, PROMISING TO LIVE WITH ONE ANOTHER FOR A LIFETIME IS HARD. FROM THE CARTOON FAMILY OF REMEMBERING THE GRANDFATHER’S LOVE OF HIS DECEASED WIFE, TO THE HUSBAND WHO CARES FOR HIS WIFE’S AFTER HER DEBILITATING

STROKE, TO THE CHILDHOOD LOVERS WHO FIND ONE ANOTHER AGAIN AFTER NEARLY 50 YEARS, TO THE GAY COUPLE CELEBRATING THEIR LOVE IN THE FACE OF SOCIETAL UNACCEPTANCE, TO MY FRIEND, WHO TOOK HER VOW OF “IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH” SERIOUSLY. WE LOVE AND ARE LOVED EVEN WHEN WE’RE TIRED, CRANKY, INSECURE, AND SICK. WE LOVE AND ARE LOVED EVEN WHEN WE PROMISED NEVER TO CRITICIZE OR ALWAYS INSIST ON OUR OWN WAY. WE DON’T NEED CARDS, FLOWERS OR CANDY TO RECOGNIZE THE GREAT GIFT OF LOVE. WHEN WE FIND IT, CHERISH IT, NURTURE IT, EVEN IF IT STAYS ALL TOO BRIEF A TIME. THIS YEAR MAY WE ALL LOVE MORE WISELY THAN LAST YEAR. MAY LOVE SURROUND OUR LIVES AND MAY OUR LOVE SURROUND OTHERS. SO BE IT.

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