

The Dance of Peacemaking and Waking Up to Love

Matthew 22:36-39, 23:23

October 1, 2023 World Communion Sunday *Series: The Universal Christ #3 (chapters 5-7)*

Rev. Cynthia Cochran-Carney, First Presbyterian Church of San Rafael, CA

A Pharisee asked him, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' "

Matthew 22:36-39

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.

Matthew 23:23

Opening

We continue our all-church exploration of themes in Richard Rohr's book *The Universal Christ*. As I am re-reading it and making notes, I am reminding myself to savor, to go slow, to pause. And I appreciate the conversations in the small groups when people are being open and honest and authentic about what resonates, what is confusing, what they disagree with. Each chapter, as we have said, is like a buffet table and today's special is whole table of main dishes and desserts labeled - "Love."

There are plenty of truisms about love. Some are profound. Some are so vague as to be meaningless. "All you need is love," as the Beatles sang. Except I need other things too, like good coffee in the morning, good shoes for walking, pockets in my clothes, and universal human rights. I don't need much.

The theory of loving each other is great. We can sing about it and celebrate it. We can lift it up as something we are called to do. And that's all good and true and right. Love is all we need.

The practice of loving each other, however, is harder. Franz Kafka once said about love:
"Love has as few problems as a motor-car. The only problems are the driver, the passengers, and the road."

Love would be easy, in other words, if it weren't for all the people we're called to love.

What We Thought Love Was

Rohr continues to invite us to notice what we have thought or believed about God, about Jesus, about the church, and about love. Maybe we have thought – love is an emotion, love is a choice, love is both a noun and a verb. And maybe we got the message in church that God will love us if we change, if we are better. In *The Universal Christ* book and particularly in chapter 5, Rohr invites to a deeper and broader understanding of love.

Love is the Meaning and Love is...

Love is energy. Love is an evolution toward union. Love is the energy that sustains the universe, moving us toward resurrection.

Pierre De Chardin - "Love is the very physical structure of the Universe." He was a scientist. There are forces of attraction in the physical world. That is a new way for me to think about love. That force, that energy that affects so much - gravity, atomic bonding, orbits, cycles, photosynthesis, ecosystems, force fields, sexuality, human friendship, animal instinct and evolution all reveal an energy that is attracting all things and beings to one another, in a movement toward greater complexity and diversity – and toward unification at ever deeper levels – love. This energy is love in many different forms.

And Rohr says we can call this energy, this force, God, the Divine, the Universal Christ, love. Whatever word we choose, it is real and we are invited to see how that energy and flow of love can change the way we see ourselves and the world. A love that is trust, that is unconditional.

Divine love is the template and model for human love, and yet human love is the necessary school for any encounter with divine love. When we experience human love — to the point of sacrifice and forgiveness and generosity — we can begin to access, imagine, and even experience a taste of God's kind of love. The invitation is to be open to this deep love, to let God love you in the deep and subtle ways that God does.

Love is about waking up and knowing - There's nothing you can do to make God love you more; and there's nothing you can do to make God love you less. It is a shared love, not a simply personal or individual.

Who is this God of Love?

The God Jesus incarnates and embodies is not a distant God that must be placated. Jesus' God is not sitting on some throne demanding worship and throwing down thunderbolts like Zeus. Jesus never said, "Worship me"; he said, "Follow me." He asks us to imitate him in his own journey of full incarnation. To do so, he gives us the two great commandments: (a) Love God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength and (b) Love your neighbor as yourself.

So how do we love God? Many people seem to assume that we love God by attending church services. For some reason, we think that makes God happy. I'm not sure why. Jesus never talked about attending services, although church can be a good container to start with. I believe our inability to recognize and love God in what is right in front of us has allowed us to separate religion from our actual lives. There is Sunday morning, and then there is real life. (1)

Rohr says - The only way I know how to teach anyone to love God, and how I myself seek to love God, is to love what God loves, which is everything and everyone, including you and including me! "We love because God first loved us."

Love is a Cosmic Dance

One image Rohr uses to describe loving God and loving our neighbor comes originally from Thomas Merton. That living a contemplative life and spiritually nurturing life is learning to dance the cosmic dance. This is why we are here on this earth, living the life we are living. At least this is one way of expressing the heart's conviction concerning the need to recognize and move with the divinity manifested in the primordial rhythms of the day-by-day life we are living. (2)

There's a dance of being awake and being asleep, of being alone and being with others. It's a dance of being seen and understood and not seen and understood at all. There's a dance of being happy and being sad. There's a dance of feeling so happy you think you're finally beginning to understand the spiritual dimension, and then this part where you don't think you ever will. The dance of being confused and having clarity, going back and forth. A dance of knowing we are deeply loved and times we feel unlovable. A rhythm of being grounded and connected to the earth and our bodies and times of feeling frustrated with our bodies.

Loving like God, loving people – incarnational love – bodies

Jesus walked the path of love in a fragile human body. He danced and celebrated with friends at a wedding. He hugged his loved ones. He kissed his friends. He ate with his friends. He fished with his disciples. He taught in worship. He faced trial, torture, and crucifixion at the hands of the Roman government. He died because he walked the path of love. All of the things he did, he did in a body.

The point of the incarnation – Divine in creation and Divine in Jesus of Nazareth and Divine in us is —that God chose to be born into a human body—is that there is nothing our human bodies can experience that God has not also experienced. Loss. Pain. Joy. Love. Grief. Tragedy. In all of it, God knows what it is to be human.

All of our bodies are beloved of God and were created by God and are worthy of protection and safety, no matter their skin color, their orientation, their shape, their nationality, their citizenship status, or their age. And we know this because God lived in a human body as Jesus. God cares about human bodies. (3)

That is a foundation for being peacemakers in the world. **The church is called to be a school of love and peacemaking.** I wonder sometimes if people who are not involved in church have started saying, "I don't think Christianity enlightens or transforms people for the better."

The truth is we are called to embody the love of Christ in this place, in this neighborhood, at this time in human history. Christian congregations must become an alternative community where people can be transformed by Christ's love. In a world where people are beaten up and bruised, we must be a community of profound respect and deep hospitality, all in the name of Jesus. In a culture that worships the mighty and shames people who struggle or feel like

outsiders, we welcome all whom Jesus loves. In a society that loses its way, we seek to follow the loving ways of Jesus and wisdom from other religious traditions. Rohr offers his hope for the future – each church be a locally and globally engaged school of love, teaching future generations to discover, practice, and live in love: love for our neighbor, love for ourselves, love for all creatures and all creation—all comprising love for God, who is all in all in all. (4)

Today as we come to the table on this World Communion Sunday, may we remember Jesus who teaches us to love, who feeds us our bodies and hearts, and sends us out to keep practicing divine choreography so that in our joy or our pain, we know our true life and love is always relational, a flow, a dance. Amen.

Primary source

Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe* (Convergent: 2019), pp. 69-80

- 1) Richard Rohr, Expanding Circles of Love, April 11, 2022, CAC Daily Meditations
<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/expanding-circles-of-love-2022-04-11/>
- 2) James Finely, A Cosmic Dance, August 27, 2023, CAC Daily Meditations
<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/a-cosmic-dance-2023-08-27/>
- 3) Marci Glass, Walking the Path of Love, June 5, 2023
<https://marciglass.com/2023/06/05/walking-the-path-of-love/>
- 4) Richard Rohr, School of Love, Jan. 3, 2020, CAC Daily Meditations
<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/a-school-for-love-2020-01-03/>