

GOTTA LOVE IT!

**A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Arthur M. Suggs
Preached on Sunday, October 19, 2014**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Tears at Weddings, Joy at Funerals

I'm attempting this morning to preach on the subject of love. It's much more intimidating than I originally thought when I decided it would be a nice subject for a Sunday morning.

First a bit of context: I have done more weddings and funerals this summer than you could shake a stick at – seven weddings and I don't know how many funerals. In them I have found expressions of love in countless different ways. Not just the kiss, for which the minister has a front-row seat (sometimes my glasses steam up on seeing that heart-warming expression of love), not just that, but love among the parents and all the bridesmaids and groomsmen.

And then at funerals. Oh my goodness, the stories that are told! It's a common thing nowadays that, after the minister does the eulogy, friends and relatives stand up and start telling stories about the deceased. They're wonderful, just wonderful tales about the relationship, about the love.

Another example: At 6:30 this morning, I'm helping my mom with personal care. At the same time my phone starts to go nuts as I receive an incoming text and another text and another text and another text, 20 texts all in a row. But I can't attend to the phone right away because I'm dealing with mom. Finally I'm done; I go over to my phone. My wife, by the way, is in New York helping with the new granddaughter, and our grandson got hold of my wife's phone, and he decided to spell his name, which is Adrian, on the phone. So I get an A, "send." D, "send." R, "send." All the way and then some. I thought China had invaded Formosa or some big news, but no, he was just sending me his name.

Thus, at 6:30 a.m. I get two expressions of love, from my mom and from my grandson.

The Visible and Temporal Are Manifestations of the Invisible and Eternal

Last Sunday we had a guest minister by the name of Anneke Peereboom. She has a Dutch name, but she is German and represents part of the connection that the United Church of Christ maintains with the Evangelical Church of Hesse and Nassau in Germany. Peereboom gave a talk afterwards in which she mentioned some German theologians, among them Mechtild of Magdeburg. That reminded me of a quote by her, but I couldn't come across it until I looked it

up last week. It's this pithy sacramental theology: "The visible and temporal are manifestations of the invisible and the eternal."

So now, three contexts of love: One is grandma and grandson, another is weddings and funerals, and still another is the quote just read, which is not explicitly about love, but I'll get to that.

Take the whole thing about three contexts of love, and set it aside for a moment. I want to talk about something else. Human beings have an incredible propensity to categorize, to subdivide. I'm told Eskimos – this is probably not true but apocryphal – I'm told Eskimos have probably two dozen or so different words for snow. And I'm told Hindus – this is probably true – have three dozen different words for states of consciousness. Only God knows how many various kinds of colors interior decorators have in their palette.

Near and Dear to Me Is The Electromagnetic Spectrum

Let me tell you about something in my world that is near and dear to me – the electromagnetic spectrum. If I spread my arms wide and point to opposite walls of our sanctuary, imagine this to represent the electromagnetic spectrum. However, if I press my hands tightly together in front of me, imagine the tiny little sliver between my palms to represent the portion of visible light in comparison with the entire electromagnetic spectrum.

If you go in one direction, the spectrum turns into ultraviolet light, the stuff that gets you either a suntan or a sunburn, depending on how much you roast yourself in the sun. If you go beyond that, you meet up with higher energy, smaller wavelengths, and then you get into X rays, which you need when you break a bone and the doctor wants to see the break. Keep going and you get into what are called gamma rays. These start to get dangerous.

Move along still further and you reach what are called cosmic rays. These are so energetic that they don't really interact much in our world, but they come from outer space and whiz right through our bodies without our noticing. When they hit the nucleus of an atom, though, they obliterate it, breaking it apart and producing an array of isotopes and elementary particle debris. This happens because the energy of a cosmic ray exceeds the binding force within the nucleus of an atom. Cosmic rays are extremely powerful, very dangerous, and they can kill you quickly.

If you go in the other direction from visible light, you get infrared. Among its multitude of applications, infrared cameras find the energy leaks in your home. Beyond that you arrive at microwaves. Keep going and you get to the GPS signal and the band that your cellphone uses. Still ahead are FM stations and then AM radio. Following are commercial and military uses, which are controlled by the government.

There's a whole spectrum of electromagnetism, and the beautiful colors that we see account for no more than the tiniest little portion of the whole.

Top of the Evolutionary Pyramid – Cats!

Or you could look at life. Everybody is concerned about the Ebola virus right now. A virus is a genetic code wrapped in a membrane. A virus is about as simple as life gets. It has one idea, it seems, and that is to find food in the form of other cells so it can replicate itself. Bacteria aren't much better; they're a lot bigger but still extremely small. One of the factoids that amuse people is that, if you could count all the cells in your body, you would have 1.5 times that many bacteria cells on and in you. And that's *after* a shower!

Protozoans, plankton, bugs, beetles, snails, fish, birds, lizards and salamanders, and then of course all the way up to the top of the evolutionary pyramid – take it from me, it's cats!

This much-abridged listing makes no mention of plants and fungi. Kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, species. How many of us learned that in grade school? Many of us did. But the list doesn't stop there. There are subspecies, regional variations, and races. Thousands of categories and subcategories. Thousands of classifications and subclassifications.

Oh Yes – Talking About Love

We've all-too-briefly hinted at the electromagnetic spectrum, life, and now comes love. Oh yes, I was talking about love.

The Greeks came up with eros, an erotic kind of love, from which we get that word. It's more the physical expression of love, while philos is more of the friendship style of love. Thus we have Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. Then there's agapē, which is a kind of high or supreme notion of love. And in English we have practically a whole library of words for love – humor me for a moment – affection, fondness, tenderness, warmth, intimacy, attachment, endearment, fervor, amity, cherish, enchanted, relish, devotion, adoration, doting, worship, passion, ardor, desire, lust, yearning, infatuation, and of course a hankering for somebody.

One Simple Concept:

It's All Love, All Light, All Life

Let me make one simple point in this sermon: Considering the electromagnetic spectrum, all the way from ultraviolet light to cosmic rays up to military radio, it's all just light. Different frequencies, different wavelengths, but it's all just light. Considering all those different forms of life, from viruses all the way up to cats, it's just life. Many thousands of different forms, but it's all just life. And considering love, from like through to endearment all the way to ardor, it's all just love.

This simple concept might strike you as trivial, but if it does, beware because it's actually not trivial at all. Just seems that way. I submit to you that this concept – that it's all love, it's all light, it's all life – might remind you of some texts in the Bible, one of which I'll hone in on at this point, where it says in the Epistle of John that God is love. We tend to think that all is well

and good regarding the higher loves – the love between spouses, the love between a mother and a child, the love that Jesus has for the world.

Good stuff. God is love. But what I'm asking you to consider is that it's just the easy part. Consider that all the loves, all of them – ice cream, going to the ocean, fishing, apple pie, music, knitting and quilting, tucking your baby in at night, Saturday morning playing golf, spaghetti dinner and the subcategory of all the other comfort foods, puppy love, teen infatuation, and all the possible subcategories – are all love.

All Love, Logically, Is All God

Logically, then, they're all God. They're all holy. We're not used to thinking that way, so here's the hard part: Go through your day with all of the loves that are in it. Some deep and powerful, some shallow and transient. Some erotic, some familial, some spiritual. All of them infused with divinity. Imagine that! Becoming increasingly aware of the power of divinity all around you, letting it color your world.

You can experiment with a single cell in a petri dish full of nutrient, and then you can watch that little cell turn into ten cells and then a hundred cells. Is it life? Yes, it is. Is it love? I submit to you that it is, at a very primitive level.

As I mentioned, Mechtild of Magdeburg said, "The visible and the temporal are manifestations of the invisible and the eternal." She also said, "All living creatures are, so to speak, sparks from the radiations of God's brilliance, and these sparks emerge from God like rays of the sun."

It is not a coincidence that God is referred to as the light of the world, the love of the world, and the life of the world.

Amen.