

## *Questions for Reflection*

Consider reflecting on these questions as you listen to the podcast. You can do this individually, with a partner, or a small group of people.

1. Where are you experiencing love this Advent season?
2. What are your hopes for love in your life, in your community, in our world this Advent?
3. What moments of your life have you experienced the most love?
4. Have you ever experienced a loss of love?
5. How do your senses experience love? (Sight, touch, smell, taste) □ What are your sources of love?
6. What lessons has love taught you?
7. Who in your life exhibits love?
8. What areas of your life do you find it challenging to experience, find, or exhibit love?

## Luke 3:7-18

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

## **Commentary on Love -- an Emotional**

**By Doug Sorensen**

This topic is difficult for me -- In part because of the limited nature of the English language (I am told that in French, for instance, there are many more terms for all that we English speakers use a single word for).

Also in part because of the setting of this commentary -- being both religious and of necessity secular. But particularly it is difficult because of the nature of the subject, and my own recognition of my past thoughts and actions, which certainly have fallen far short of the objectives we say we seek. By that I mean to ask myself and those listening to this Podcast to think about love as an emotion or feeling, on the one hand, and perhaps for purposes of this discussion, a relationship on the other hand.

I am suggesting that we explore our feelings (warm fuzzy to euphoric) about things, or people, we might describe as our favorites ("I love apple pie", or in my case "I love rhubarb pie"), or "I love my spouse" or "I love my parents".

By suggesting we explore those feelings I mean for us to ask ourselves if that is the love referred to in Biblical terms, such as the directive that we love those who do us harm, or the love for strangers in need who sit on our pathway through life, or even those we are close to who verbally or physically treat us harshly. And perhaps this question should reach as far as asking what our relationship is with God herself (If I may be so bold as to suggest a gender image.)

I would suggest the answer is no, that is not the love we are talking about when we view it from the perspective of the Christian journey.

I would suggest then that we look at questions of love regarding strangers, those that do harm, those that are in need, and the God we say we love, and think in terms of relationships. It seems to me that that conjures up a much more active sense of acknowledgement, understanding, and action in each of the circumstances with which we are individually confronted. It is important, I believe, that we also understand that we are called as individuals, rather than groups, parties, neighborhoods or even whole nations, to think about these relationships on a personal level. Even though we may act collectively on many levels, we should consider our actions or inactions as personal choices. I grant that such a personal choice becomes particularly difficult when our peers, or neighbors, or even fellow church members may not see the same relationship need.

But how do we perceive a relationship as possible regarding persons we are told to hate, or told to seek revenge on or told to ignore? And even more difficult, how do we build such a relationship. I think in part it calls upon us to make hard choices, and to at least understand those we may view as our enemies simply because of the way they dress, or speak, or the place of their birth. Simply put, we should shun – ignore – not care for those who we see as different. This requires effort, which requires commitment, which requires a willingness to build a bond at least at some level. In school, it means standing up when others would treat someone outside of your circle of “friends” as an outcast. In the neighborhood it may mean assisting a new neighbor who other say “just doesn’t fit in.” At work it may mean standing up for the one with no social skills or is “different” who becomes the last to be given opportunities others regularly share.

We then come to what I think is the greater challenge. That is, the discovery of a pathway to understand and nurture our Biblically necessary relationship to those who would actively do harm, either to us or to those whom we believe should not be harmed. Granted, this does not include every unwilling soldier in the army of the tyrant, but it certainly includes those whom actively choose the path they are on. How is this issue helped if we understand the tools of forgiveness, understanding, finding common ground? Or do we have hearts hardened to the point that we believe it is useless to even try?

Ultimately this discussion cannot end without questioning our love of God. Is this a fuzzy or even euphoric feeling like appreciating his creation and the feeling of His or Her presence, but what about my or your relationship. How does it fit with the language of acknowledgement, understanding, and action in each of the circumstances with which we are individually confronted?

We must each in our own world and journey through it reach our own answers to these questions. It is sometimes very lonely, and it is sometimes a very euphoric journey.

## **The Rustle of Angels- by Ted Loder**

God of thunderous silence, deliver us from words  
that gush but slake no thirst, that charm, but scour no truth, that seduce, but conceive  
no intimacy;

hush us to quietness to hear the rustle of angels in the unaffected laughter and tears of  
others, and ourselves;

and be stunned to awe by others' simply inexplicable being-there-ness, their bodies,  
breathing, eye-lit-mystic beauty, and by ours.

Ease us, Unhurried One, into the depths of accurate listening  
that, beneath the babble, we may attend to  
the pleading in others' eyes, the longing in their smiles, the loneliness in their slump,  
the fears in the their curses,

the courage in their squint, the wisdom in the scars, the joy in their timid loves, the  
faithfulness in their beginning yet again;

that on the whispered, groaning, stammering edge  
of so much hope and need and grace

we may begin to wrestle to

some limp of understanding, some tilt of trust, some murmur of gratitude,

for this not-so-minor miracle, for this merely beloved all

of yours

we are.

Amen.

