

Homily for February 12, 2006.

Standing on the Side of Love.

By The Reverend Lone Jensen

Earlier, we all sang a great song from the new hymnal supplement, “Standing on the side of love” The rebel part of me loves those “take a stand” songs. To the barricades with joy! But what does the phrase mean? After all who would not want to stand on the side of love? Well, actually now that I think about it a few religious leaders not associated with this congregation comes to mind. So what does it mean? That we believe in equal rites as in same sex marriage? Well yes, I think that is part of it. That we consider this a justice issue is also true. We affirm that two people who love one another should be able to make the same commitment, as any other couple, who happens to be a man and a woman, can. Well, in most Unitarian Universalist congregations that will hardly come as a surprise nor frankly will it, anymore, around here generate much of a controversy. I am not talking about the rest of the world now. Of course we believe this. Most of us do anyhow. Now if you are a visitor here for the first time some of this may be news to you. Hang in there with me and it will all become clear. Or so I hope!

You should know that the Universalists saw God as love manifested in the human heart and most importantly in how we act with one another. With this I agree. Shall we believe in God at all then surely it should be a loving God who compassionate and bigger than us. Not the cruel, harsh caricature painted by those who seem utterly obsessed with what other people do in the privacy of their bedroom. Sex of course is not the same as love. Marriage is a constant love, a faithful love and means: I want to spend my life with you. How my marriage would be in danger from anyone else marrying each other is beyond me. Love that overused, often misused and very imprecise word still embodies our best hope for a gentler, kinder society, indeed for humanity's very survival. It is cause for joy and celebration. Love your neighbor, love your children, love your parents, love your friends, love each other, love this blue planet home and be grateful you can love even when it is so hard to do. Love as a way of being in the world is akin to compassion, as close as we can get to enlightenment and the divine and when it comes to lasting love, there is nothing easy or light about it. But it does have a funny side and oh, as any married couple knows you better not take yourself too seriously. Laughter saves many relationships from crashing on the rocks.

Ok, so let us say I am preaching to choir. Say Amen choir! But let us go a bit deeper. There is more to standing on the side of love than justice and equality issues. All of us have grown up in societies that were, and God help us, still are, very homophobic. Like racism we can't just decide that from this moment on I will be washed clean of all prejudice and preconceptions and murky feelings and be well, pure as the driven snow...wait a minute, snow is white isn't it? Can't get away from those loaded words can we? Love, now there is a loaded word. Add Sex with a capital S into the mixture and it becomes like fireworks, explosive. Imaginations can easily run wild and often do. Especially among those of us who have learned in one way or another that sex was taboo, a secret and dirty topic. Religion in general has a lot to answer for here. Instead of teaching us that our bodies are part of the sacred universe to be treated as we would such a precious gift, many of us instead were taught that our flesh was inferior to the soul and was to be ignored and overcome. Sin was equated with giving in to our body's urges, virtue with resistance. So we have had a long list in all denominations and most major faiths of abuses of the body in order to get closer to God. There were the saints who lived on top of pillars in the desert long ago, nuns who starved themselves into visions, puritans who avoided any show of color and beauty, the Taliban who outlawed music and kite flying,

protestant ministers in this country who would allow a woman to die rather than grant her the right to an abortion and on and on. And just in case you think that this does not apply to rational human beings, well *mind over matter* is at best a false statement. This I believe. We are born with original blessings not original sin. We have learned to ignore our bodies and at the same time as a society are obsessed with sex and how we look. Just listen to the messages: Too fat, too old, Botox and plastic surgery, extreme makeovers, youths who are told by all the media to be seductively sexy and at the same time to abstain from sex until marriage, it is a contradictory and crazy making mess! So to me standing on the side of love also means that we honor our bodies. I am proud and grateful we have a great Religious Education program in ***Our Whole Lives*** that reflect this grateful attitude. It is so rare in society and in religion to find some common sense when it comes to sex and love and relationships. In fact it is far too easy to find the exact opposite.

One of the worst, most heartless and cruel examples of outbreaks of homophobia lately I have heard of lately has to be the demonstrations that have been reported at some soldier's funerals. When I first heard about such demonstrations I was afraid it was people against the war who were doing this. Since I rather sympathize with most peace mongers I cringed at the thought. But

no, it was an unknown group, people who wanted to make the point that this soldier died for a country that accepts homosexuals. So they show up and shout at the grieving families. Excuse me, but how crazy is this? How cruel true believers can be.

Homophobia as all prejudices grows in an atmosphere of fear. It is really the fear of our own sexuality, our own hidden desires, projected on the other, the stranger, those we think are not like us. Think of how it was in the South years ago when the ultimate obsession and taboo was white woman and black men. Whose fantasies are we really talking about here? How murderous was the underlying rage and how cruel was the results.

Love is a rare gift, lasting and constant love even rarer. It is a sacred thing to love. I will never understand why it bothers some people so much that there is more joy in the world. Nor can I, who am straight but not narrow, understand fully what it means to live in a society where your love is looked upon as a shame. The closest I came to that feeling was at an Aids benefit some thirty years ago when the Unitarian Church had turned out in force at a Gay Bar. A very flamboyant Gay Bar was invaded by well meaning church folks who looked like refugees from an LL Bean catalogue. That we stood out is an understatement. The MC, part of a band named fresh fruits fresh at one point asked: Will those of you who are heterosexuals please raise your hands. The hands rose

very slowly and hesitatingly. We were, for once, in the minority. If you are straight, but not narrow, try to imagine a society where you are in the minority. When was the last time you were identified as “a heterosexual”? Imagine you hesitate to hold hands with your sweetheart or showing affection in public for fear of being accused of “flaunting your heterosexuality?” Think of a world where you had to deny, as did some of the marines I knew in Wilmington, a large part of your identity. Where you would change the sex of your spouse in conversations or not talk about love at all. How would that feel? Imagine living in a society where you could get beaten up if you visited certain straight bars, not that you liked bars, but it was one of the few places you could meet others of the opposite sex. Boggles the mind? Would you have the courage to come out? What if your two mommies would disown you?

It is high time that religions speak out against hate and prejudice in all its forms. On this Valentine’s Day I invite you to go beyond cupid, roses and chocolate, delicious and wonderful as they can be. This special day, when we honor love, human and divine, calls also for us to take a joyful life affirming stand for love. As the precious gift it is. And I do want to recognize and honor this day those among you who are lonely. This day is not easy for you. If you have lost someone recently then this day can

be heartbreakingly difficult. If this is where you are on this day then may you find glimpses of joyful memories even within your deep sadness! I marvel at the strength of human love. I know that at the end of our own lives, if we are conscious, it is the knowledge of that love that will get us through the final moments and the memory of the love shared that will help those who are left behind. These are the times when love is a sacred act. It is at such times when sitting at someone's bedside that human love seems to cross over into what I would call divine love. In the sense that it transcends the suffering and the pain of the moment to bless those who are present. No it does not take away the pain. But real love is never painless!

There is no such thing in this world as a perfect marriage, union, friendship or family. We know this and yet at times behave like recalcitrant children having temper tantrums because our partner does not give us everything we want. Humor keeps us real as in this poem by Marge Piercy. Feel free to make it gender neutral in your own mind. *Remember the princess who kissed the frog so he became a prince? At first they danced all weekend toasted each other in the morning with coffee, with champagne at night and always with kisses. Perhaps it was in bed after the first year that she noticed he had become cold with her. She had to sleep with a heating pad and a down comforter. His manner grew*

increasingly chilly and damp when she entered a room. He spent his time in winter sports, hydroponics, working on his insect collection...

Then in the third year when she said to him one day: My dearests are you taking your vitamins daily, you look quite green, he leaped away from her. Finally on their fifth anniversary she confronted him. My precious don't; you love me any more? He replied: Rivet, Rivet, Rivet! Though courtship turns frogs into princes marriage turns them quietly back.

What happens over time is that the veil is torn from the lovers faces and they see each other not as they *imagined* but as they really *are*. Behold me then just as I am! If they are wise or lucky they will like what they see *most* of the time. Love takes many forms. Diane Ackerman compares love to a crystal prism which reveals a spectrum of colors once the sunlight dances through it at the right angle. Love takes courage. We dare to love each other. We love parents and children and spouses and lovers. And then we love, or at least try to love our neighbors. It all takes courage. Human relationships are messy. And though this day is for romantic love I want to open our hearts wider than that. Let us not only dare to love, as God is love, but also act from our hearts. On this Valentine's Day and for all the right reasons: let us stand together on the side of love.

