

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:

Today, as you all know, is the Feast Day of St. Valentine...

The early martyrologies record three different Saint Valentines

under the date of 14 February:

One is described as a priest in Rome,

another as the Bishop of Terni,

both were martyred in the second half of the third century.

The third Saint Valentine was martyred in Africa.

Our current customs associated with Saint Valentine's Day had their origin during the Middle Ages,

when it was believed that on 14 February,

half way through the second month of the year,

the birds began to pair.

Chaucer's *Parliament of Foules* records the belief:

For this was sent on Seynt Valentyne's day
Whan every foul cometh ther to choose his mate.

So the day was understood to be a special day for lovers

and became associated with writing love letters.

In the well known Paston Letters,

correspondence between members of the Paston family,

written between 1422 and 1509,

Dame Elizabeth Brews writes to her daughter's suitor:

...Monday is Saint Valentine's Day and every bird chooses himself a mate, and if it pleases you to come on Thursday night...I trust to God that ye shall speak to my husband...that we may bring the matter to a conclusion.

Shortly after her daughter wrote a letter to the same man addressing it

"Unto my rightwell beloved Valentine, John Paston".

In the Huffington Post this week was a nice article entitled:

Transforming Valentine's Day (and Letting it Transform You)

The article accuses Valentine's Day in modern times of being the occasion for holding in stark relief **the fantasy of loving relationships** with their sometimes **unpleasant reality**.

I have always called this distance between fantasy and reality
tragedy

at the same time understanding that a reasonable distance
between the two

can be inspiring and energizing

as we work to attain our fantasies and hopes.

The point of the article was to suggest a redefinition of the What, When, and Who of Valentine's Day:

1) Redefining the "What": That Valentine's Day is For Everyone

In Finland,

rather than a day devoted to idealized romantic love,

Valentine's Day is focused primarily on friendship,

with everyone celebrating the bonds of friendship

a celebration of the connectedness of humanity

and the affirmation of all of our relationships.

Isn't this what we did in school growing up...have a Valentine's day card for each of our classmates?

2) Redefining the "When": Every Day is Valentine's Day

While Valentine's Day is a good reminder,

once a year isn't enough.

Reach out to friends and loved ones on a regular basis.

Get in the habit of finding opportunities to express your appreciation.

3) Redefining the "Who": Be Your Own Valentine

It's hard to love others if we don't love ourselves. "

Do you actively love yourself?

- Forgive Yourself
- Take Care of Yourself
- Listen to Yourself
- Invest in Yourself
- Like Yourself

I would recommend finding this article at [HuffingtonPost.com](https://www.huffpost.com)...in its simplicity it is helpful...

Not to mention that it proves we ourselves are

open and loving

inclusive and tolerant

that something from Arianna Huffington would be recommended from this pulpit

But let me further and more importantly suggest to you that this is a subject that Christianity has very much to say...

It is interesting that in the lectionary we use,

which was set in the 1970's

St. Paul's universally cherished passage from First Corinthians would be the Epistle assigned for this day...

With 32 years of pastoral experience, and theological and biblical reflection,

not to mention 37 years of marriage under my belt

I have some insights I would like to share on this subject of love...

Firstly...as the song goes...falling in love with love is falling for make-believe...

Our young people are so pushed by both God's own design of sexual desire and Hollywood's barrage of chick flicks

that it is easy to come to the conclusion that one cannot be whole unless they are attached to another

so there is a natural but often premature desire to be in a loving relationship...

I would suggest that when you are really in love it hits you like a polo mallet upside the head

There is no question about it

If you need to seek out relationship counseling

to hold the relationship together until the wedding ceremony

forget it...

Real love is mutual and it is clear

Or maybe that was just Jessie

...but my witness is there was no doubt about it

...love is overwhelming and reciprocal

Secondly one cannot be in an effective relationship before one is able to be with themselves...

Jess Trotter, one of my wisest seminary professors, used to demand that we spend time alone with ourselves

Suggesting this was particularly devastating because in that silence we find out how absolutely boring we are

But his point with us was that

until we know ourselves, own ourselves, claim ourselves

it was not possible to be in relationship with another

Otherwise our relationships were either:

two unformed selves inappropriately clinging to each other

like we often see pitifully at the mall

or that the other was simply narcissistic extensions of ourselves

trophy wives come to mind as an illustration

Thirdly...loves grows from adolescent to maturity

It has been stunning to me over the years when couples proclaim, playing off the words of that famous Righteous Brothers' song:

"We've lost that loving feeling"

As we mature we should leave behind that sort of obsessive, hormone fueled, definition of love we have when we are younger

...and embrace the yet more excellent love God has in store for us

Love, as St. Paul defines in this morning's epistle, is so much more, and so much better

And a clear indication that we are not letting love grow to be what God intended

...that we are stuck in the first stage of love

...is when we feel we have lost that loving feeling

Although that early stage is of God's creative purpose

...it is not the end game

One of my favorite songs is the Dennis Yost and the Classics IV hit:

I love you more today than yesterday
But not as much as tomorrow

Every day's a new day in love with you
With each day comes a new way of loving you

Cupid, we don't need you now, be on your way
I thank the Lord for love like ours that grows ever stronger

The witness of all of our parishioners who have been married for many years is that the blessings of the years

are more than we would have ever imagined or dreamed

more today than yesterday but not as much as tomorrow

But these sorts of experience are not confined to marriage

they extend to our children

they extend to our friends through thick and thin

and this is just as God intends our relationships to grow

Which brings me to my forth point...

that we can only love with the love with which we have been loved

This is on one hand a therapeutic insight

...if you were parented poorly or in a bad relationship

...it will diminish your ability to love and to be in a healthy loving relationship

It is similar to abuse

...if your parents are abusive

...that is what you expect and accept from others

And here is ultimately where the gospel message of God's perfect and complete love for us

has a final and transcendent word for us:

God's love for us is the love with which we have been loved

and is the love from which we can love others...

This is the truth that should cascade from one generation to the next

As we are loved by God and love others in the same way

God's Kingdom becomes a present reality

This is what St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians means when it says:

...be imitators of God, as beloved children,

...and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us,

...a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This is the truth of the Gospel...isn't it

...that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,

...that all that believe in him shall not perish but have everlasting life...

And this is the love with which we have been loved

And it is this love with which we should love others

And this is the heart of the story of the transfiguration in this morning's gospel

Jesus is transfigured before his disciples.

The revelation confirms what Peter had confessed just a few verses before

that Jesus is savior and lord

ever and afresh revealing his love

the love with which we are loved

beyond all other loves

And we all have had such a moment...a moment of transfiguration.

When the glory of God shines through
 into the darkest moments of our lives
 When we confess Jesus is Lord
 When we are loved by God's own love

But like Peter and his comrades

We are apt to keep these moments to ourselves
 To not share our love
 To not tell our experience of God's love

Which is by definition the very evangelism we are called to do

Peter says: 'Lord, let us make three booths'...

And this is the problem with great experiences
 if kept to ourselves
 they freeze rather than liberate

William Blake wrote:

'The cistern contains;
 the fountain overflows;
 Expect poison from the standing water.'

Unfortunately, we individually and in our church can become a cistern!

If we don't love with God's love with which we have been loved
we become stagnate...even poisonous...

We have been truly blessed

We have been loved by God himself

We have had moments of transfiguration when Christ has become
God for us

We will have such a moment in a moment in the bread and wine of
Holy Communion

And so we must love with this love with which we have been loved

Less the fountain becomes a cistern:

And we become and produce poison from the standing water...

We must love all those God has given us to love

Both in our families and in our community

And those strangers who come our way

To share the love with which we have been loved

It is our witness and our story to be told

It is the very evangelism to which we are called...

And this is our call to evangelism, is it not:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”