

**“Give Yourself to Love**  
**Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley**  
**February 13, 2005**  
**The Rev. Judy Welles©**

**First Reading**

The Force of Gravity  
Jeremy Taylor

Newton, in his rational passion  
Spinning star-struck  
from his meeting with Eve’s apple,  
Invested everything with the dignity  
Of numbers.

Playing at the edges of fathomless oceans,  
Riding on the shoulders of giants,  
He called the force that binds the universe  
In its energetic dance  
“The Force of Gravity.”  
But in his seriousness, he forgot  
That even clothed in numbers  
And the shining certainties of thought,  
The attraction of all things  
For one another and themselves  
Is another metaphor of love.<sup>1</sup>

**Second Reading**

God Is Love  
Hugh and Gayle Prather

God is the river of light in which we all bathe. This brilliance flows through the core of every living thing. Nothing within the warring, separated images of the world reflects the unity of God, and yet the unseen waters of love surround us in all circumstances — no matter how petty or shameful or tragic [those circumstances] may be.

The uncomplicated reason that the experience of God must follow our decision to make another person’s happiness as important as our own is that God *is* oneness. God is what creates and sustains and joins the spirit. God is our shared heart and mind. Although within the world God goes unrecognized, those who see their oneness with just one other living thing cannot fail to see God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Jeremy *Nurturing the Creative Impulse*, Dream Tree Press (self-published), 1982

<sup>2</sup> Prather, Hugh and Gayle, “God Is Love,” in *Handbook of the Heart*, Little Brown and Co., 1996, edited by Richard Carlson and Benjamin Shield; pages 85-86.

## Sermon

## Give Yourself to Love

So is it God, or is it gravity? Is love the attraction that all things have for one another, as described by physics, or is it the force that creates and sustains and joins the spirit, a force that some of us call God? God or gravity? And the more important question: does it matter? There are so many manifestations of love, so many ways to understand and experience love, we could choose from among a thousand metaphors to describe love, and all of them would be right, though perhaps incomplete. Gravity is a good metaphor for love. God is a good way to understand what love can be. The two or five or twenty metaphors that you have for love are undoubtedly just as good.

But more important than describing love or understanding love is *being loving*. “Lead lives of love, that others who behold your lives may kindle too with love, and cast their lot with you.”

That is what we are about here, leading lives of love and inspiring in others the same dedication to love, the same open-heartedness and warmth, compassion and commitment to make things better. We want the way we lead our lives to inspire others to cast their lot with us.

In our task of transforming lives and caring for the world, our greatest tool is love. All the kinds of love, all the ways love manifests, all the allure and attraction that love holds out. In each of us, and in every person on earth, there is something like a little magnet in the heart that recognizes love, that turns toward it and wants to draw closer to it. Perhaps without words, without any objective understanding, we recognize love when we are near it, and love recognizes us.

Make no mistake, my friends. Love needs us just as much as we need love. For love to exist, it needs agents; it needs hands and smiles and words and hearts and gestures. It needs promises; it needs trust; it needs memories and dreams. Love is only an abstraction until it merges with human flesh and a human heart — and once that happens, miracles can occur.

So give yourselves to love, if love is what you’re after. If our work is to care for the world and transform lives, we need to do that in the spirit of love, with love as our companion and our instrument, our needle and thread, our quill pen, our plumb line and ball of string, our paintbrush.

It’s challenging to talk to a large group of people about love around Valentines Day, because most of what is in the air right now is about romantic love. Send flowers to your sweetie, buy chocolates for your spouse; you’ll be in trouble if you don’t produce a card tomorrow. But today we’re talking about something bigger, something that touches everyone in this room. Not everyone here is partnered, and if they are partnered, well... maybe it’s not all that romantic. But even if we don’t have romantic love in our lives right now, we all have love in some form. Romantic love is only one of the manifestations of love, that greater love that calls to us and needs us to act and live on its behalf. Romantic love is part of the picture, but it’s a *big* picture and it hangs on

the world's walls all year 'round, not just at Valentine's Day. Let's take a closer look and see what else is in the picture...

There's brotherly love, or "brotherness," as the African tale called it. Of course this doesn't refer only to males or brothers; everyone is capable of knowing brotherly love; it's the way you love your dear friends as well as your siblings. Let's call this kind of love "Amy," and let's get to know her.

Amy is very good at sports. When it's her turn to choose a team, she makes sure that the clumsy kid doesn't get called last. She has a great time cheering on her teammates and slapping them on the back whether they do well or not. Of course she likes it when her team wins, but if they lose she laughs it off and says "Let's go get something to eat."

Amy is deeply loyal. She's a truth-teller, and she holds her friends accountable for what they have done. Her standards are high, but she's also very forgiving and quick to encourage them to try again if they mess up. "I know you've got it in you," she'll say.

She has a long memory, too. It's really fun to hang out on her deck in the summer shade, eating apples and cheese and reminiscing. She remembers every funny thing you've ever said, and the memories never fail to bring on her hearty laugh. Somehow, though, she doesn't seem to have such a good memory for your selfish acts or thoughtlessness. If you bring up a time when you did something dumb, she just says "Hmmh..." and changes the subject.

Amy lives in a tidy shambles. That is, she owns a lot of stuff and it's all over her house, but she knows where everything is, and she'll be quick to offer you not only a snack, but the plate and napkin she serves you with. Every once in a while she will gather up a lot of stuff — clothes, canned food, blankets — and take it around to people who need it. She volunteers at a homeless shelter one night a week, and never shows up for her shift without her arms full.

Amy needs you. She can't do it all herself, even though she tries her best. She needs you for your loyalty, your willingness to forgive, your affection for your friends and all the ingenious ways you show it. She needs you to be generous and easy-going, and to stand by her side with your arm around her as she greets the world. Give yourself to brotherly love.

Then there is parental love. Not all of us are parents, but we've all had parents. If we had a good childhood, then we know what parental love is. And if we didn't, we may be breaking new ground as we try to improve on what we learned.

Parry isn't as thin as he used to be. From the back, he's pretty broad in the beam, and when you look at him sideways you can see how his stomach is starting to bulge over his beltline. His thighs are big, too, and not as muscular as they once were. But when he sits down, what a comfy, generous lap he makes!

Parry is a lot smarter than people give him credit for. He knows when to hold firm and when to give in. It's called "choosing your battles." He doesn't always give his kids what they want, but sometimes he'll go to a lot of trouble to make sure a child knows she is loved. Once he left work in the middle of the afternoon and drove fifty miles to pick up a Cabbage Patch doll when they were scarce and his daughter wanted one so badly.

If you were to ask him what he wants the most for his children, he would tell you "Choices. I want them always to be able to choose between options, and I want them to have the self-confidence to make a good choice." Of course, they don't always do that. Parry is very good at keeping his mouth shut and not offering advice unless someone directly asks for it. The words "I told you so" have never passed his lips.

Parry is good at explaining how things work, and very patient. He doesn't jump in to help too quickly, and has even been known to look the other way if a child was about to hurt himself, as long as it wasn't badly. One of his favorite things to do is take his children to story hour at the library; he'll sit on the floor with several kids climbing over him (not all of them his own), listening raptly as the librarian reads a story. Afterwards he waits for as long as it takes while each of his children chooses some books to take home. All of his children got their own library cards when they turned six, and they have to pay the late fines out of their own allowances.

Even though Parry has a lot of children, he's still stunned by the miracle that they exist at all. When they were babies, he used to spend hours just standing by their cribs watching them breathe. He still likes to gaze at his children when they are sleeping; they are so uncomplicated then that it helps him to remember how much he loves them when things aren't going well. And things don't always go well.

Parry needs you. There aren't enough laps to go around for all the children that need an adult to hold them. He is a good listener, but being a good listener by definition means that you only listen to one child at a time, and so many children need an adult to listen to them. Parry can't break up all the fights that kids get into, and although he insists that his children always write thank-you notes for gifts, there are so many children who need coaching so that they can move gracefully in the world. Whether you're a parent or not, give yourself to parental love. Parry needs you for your patience, your flexibility, and your hopefulness. He understands that it takes hope to raise happy children.

Then there is erotic love. Eros gets a bad rap, because people keep mixing him up with Pornography, which is actually his opposite. Pornography is about the deadening of feeling, while Eros is all about bringing feelings alive.

Eros loves to dance, and he's very good at it. Somehow, when you dance with Eros, you become a terrific dancer, too, and you end up having more fun than you thought possible. When Eros dances, people might stand around and watch for a little while, but soon everyone joins in.

Eros takes great pleasure in good food and wine, interesting colors and textures, fine art and music. That is, he appreciates all these things, but what gives him the most

pleasure is creating them himself — cooking, playing the saxophone, throwing pots on his wheel. The act of creativity is the source of joy for Eros. Some people think that he's selfish, because he does what he wants. But if you really notice what he is doing, you will see that he is motivated by a profound, authentic love for life, and that he is very honest. He has a deep understanding of the fullness of life, and all the possibilities that life offers. His favorite word is "Yes!"

Eros's best friend is Spirituality, and it really makes him angry when people try to keep them apart. Both of them have been fighting this battle for more than twenty centuries, and it's quite irritating, but they manage to get together more frequently than you might imagine. They love to tumble into bed and make love all night long, but they are never seen together the next morning in church.

Eros takes his responsibilities very seriously, though you might not realize that when you first see his radiant smile and uncontrollable energy. He's something of a gadfly, because once you let Eros into your life, you will never again be satisfied with boredom or shoddiness. On the other hand, why would you *want* to be bored? Eros opens doors, and once they are opened, you can't close them again.

There is so much in life today that threatens to numb us until we forget what it is like to feel. Eros needs you for those moments of pure joy when you lose track of your *self* and merge with all that is. You have those moments now and then, don't you? Those moments when time and space switch places, and you flow outward into pure sensation? When you do, thank Eros for taking you there, and make a promise to him that you'll do it again. Give yourself to Eros.

One figure that you might not notice at first in that Big Picture of love is Compassion. She's quiet, although not at all shy, and she doesn't stand out in a crowd. Although she moves easily in all cultures, Compassion feels most at home in Buddhism, where they call her Tara, the goddess of mercy. (That's her Tibetan Buddhist image on the cover of your Order of Service.)

Tara is very, very old, but she has such a loving heart that you don't notice her age when you encounter her; just her kindness and her gentle smile. She is a student of history, always trying to expand her understanding of the human condition and deepen her awareness of the suffering of all beings.

Despite her age, Tara gets around. She was standing with the other women on the hill at Golgotha when Jesus was crucified. She spent a lot of time among the inmates in the concentration camps, doing her best to help them through their nightmare. And even though you didn't actually see her on television, she was there among the firefighters and police running up the stairs at the World Trade Center on September 11. Right now she's spending a lot of time in Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

You will often see Tara with her hand on her heart, or rubbing her chest where her heart lies. That's because her heart often aches. Just as it says in the song, Tara has opened up her heart to the tears and laughter. Actually she doesn't cry very much, but she does feel a lot of sadness, though she doesn't show it. She is quite even-tempered, even under a lot of stress; that is what has allowed her to live to such a ripe old age.

She has figured out how to feel deeply without losing the calmness at the center of her being. She doesn't talk much, but when she does, she always tells the truth, and that helps her to remain calm and clear.

Compassion's best friend is Courage. You can see them hand in hand, quietly walking right into a hospital Emergency Room, or the courtyard of a prison, or an AA meeting, or a playground where mean big kids are ganging up on some little ones, and when they arrive things seem to settle down. She can't make people's problems go away, but when Tara is around they begin to feel like their unbearable pain might be bearable after all.

Compassion needs you. She needs your hands to reach out and hold someone else's hands; she needs to hear the steadiness of your breath and your heartbeat in a tense situation. She needs you to look clearly into the eyes of the frightened children, the grieving widows, the homeless people sitting on the sidewalk. Give yourself to compassion.

Over the next days and weeks, when you are sitting or lying with your eyes closed but not asleep, I invite you to take a long look at the Big Picture of Love that is hanging on the walls of the world. Look for parental love, brotherhood, erotic energy, compassion, and all the other hundreds of manifestations of love. Your face is in that picture, too, because love is working through your life even when you don't always know it. Love has given itself to you. So give yourself to love.

Amen.