

PERHAPS LOVE

Inspired by the John Denver Song

Week #2 of an 8-week "Songs of Life" Series

June 13, 2021

Rev. Richard Maraj

SOLO

Guest artist Todd Herzog sings the message title song, "Perhaps Love"

Perhaps love is like a resting place, a shelter from the storm
It exists to give you comfort; it is there to keep you warm
And in those times of trouble when you are most alone
The memory of love will bring you home

Perhaps love is like a window; perhaps an open door
It invites you to come closer; it wants to show you more
And even if you lose yourself and don't know what to do
The memory of love will see you through

Oh, love to some is like a cloud, to some as strong as steel
For some a way of living, for some a way to feel
And some say love is holding on and some say letting go
And some say love is everything and some say they don't know

Perhaps love is like the ocean, full of conflict, full of change
Like a fire when it's cold outside or thunder when it rains
If I should live forever and all my dreams come true,
My memories of love will be of you

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[Congregation applauds]

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Maraj: Whooo! Todd Herzog! *[Congregation applauds]* That was beautiful, man; thank you! Thank you!

So this mom is making pancakes for her kids; they were 5- and 3-years-old. And they started arguing about who was going to get the first pancake! So the mom thought she'd make this a teaching moment: give them a little moral lesson, and said, *"If Jesus was here, out of his love, he would give your brother that pancake and wait for one himself."* And so the mom leaves the room and the 5-year-old grabs the pancake and looks at the younger one and says, *"You be Jesus."* *[Congregation laughs]*

So today we're talking about love! You know, love is the thing that we all want. Love is the thing that we all seek. Love is the thing that we all need, yearn and hunger for. From the time we are born 'til the time we die, the most important thing we want, seek and need is love.

The Bible tells us clearly that we are here for love. To love one another. It says love is the fulfilling of the Law. It says in Corinthians that we can have all the knowledge of all the mysteries; that we can have all

the possessions in the world. But if we have not love, we have nothing. There is no question: love is the thing.

The question is: What is love? How would you describe love? How do you define love? What does love look like for you? What does love feel like?

Throughout history, we've been trying to capture the meaning of love. Love is the number one theme expressed in art. In poetry. In philosophy. Psychology. In novels and movies and in music. Do you know that the number of songs written about love take up 65% of all songs written? I don't think that's surprising, because love is so important to us!

Listen to these song titles to hear the different ideas and aspects and kinds of love we think there are: *Big Love, Higher Love, Endless Love, Baby Love, Puppy Love, Muskrat Love ... [Congregation and Rev. Maraj laugh]* I'm surprised there's not squirrel love in there, but ... *[Congregation laughs]* *Real Love, A Crazy Little Thing Called Love, Jungle Love, Radar Love, The Look of Love, Lost in Love, The Power of Love, The Glory of Love, The Chapel of Love, Sunshine of Your Love, A Groovy Kind of Love, A Whole Lotta Love. Where is the Love? Love is in the Air! Love is All Around Us. I Just Called to Say I Love You 'cause I Can't Get Enough of Your Love, Babe. [Congregation Laughs]* *And If Loving You is Wrong, I Don't Want to be Right!*

But some of these love things can get really negative, some of the love songs and titles! Like: *Love Stinks. Love Hurts. Love is a Battlefield. Only Love Can Break Your Heart. I Know I'll Never Love This Way Again. Bye Bye, Love. Tainted Love. Why Do Fools Fall in Love? I'm Not in Love, So Don't Forget It. [Congregation laughs]* *And I'm All Out of Love.* And I'm all out of the titles, too! *[Congregation laughs]*

But as many songs as are written, and as much as we think we know how to define and describe love, I bet you we all agree that loving people is not easy. Loving ourselves is not easy. Love is not easy. How many people would agree that there's at least one area in your life where you know you could love a little better or a little fuller?

By the divorce rates, by the split in families, by the conflict and killing and violence and war, we can tell that we – as a human family – have not mastered love.

Thích Nhất Hạnh, the Buddhist monk – in his book, *The Awakened Heart* – says that we all have an amazing, almost unlimited, potential for love ... but we are all a work in progress. That we need to learn to love better; to understand love; to practice love; to meditate on love. Because love is a gift; love is a blessing. But love is also our work! It is our human work; it is our spiritual work. Love is the most powerful force in the universe! Love calms and soothes and heals. It unites. It uplifts. It nurtures. It opens and transforms. Love is the thing we all want and seek more than anything else, because love is what makes life fulfilling.

Today we're in the second week of our eight-week "Songs of Life" series. And this week we're going to look at the song by John Denver called "Perhaps Love." It was in 1981 – written in '81. And it came out as a duet with Plácido Domingo. Anybody remember this song? Remember this song?

And so, when he wrote it, he was actually really struggling and down. He was feeling lost. He was going through a divorce, and it was really a painful experience for him. And he reflected on and remembered things like his dad, who passed away, and how much he loved him. And how nice people were to send cards that made him feel supported and comforted. He thought about his mom's love, and how nurturing she was. And he thought about the love of his fans, who loved his music and allowed him to do the thing he loved ... which was music.

So, in his troubled times, he tapped into and connected with a variety of different aspects of love that inspired him to write the song. And here's the first verse:

*Perhaps love is like a resting place, a shelter from the storm
It exists to give you comfort; it is there to keep you warm*

*And in those times of trouble when you are most alone
The memory of love will bring you home*

One of the things I like about this song is it seems, to me, to explore the dimensions of how love heals and helps us through tough times. That, even in our times of trouble, when we are most alone ... That even when we lose ourselves – the second verse says – and don't know what to do. That in conflict and in pain, love is always available to us and for us.

I'll be every one of us has had times when we felt alone. When we felt lost. When we felt a little beat up and knocked down and even overwhelmed by life. We've all had times when we felt like we were running a few quarts low on love. We didn't feel the love. We didn't see the light. That we just felt stuck; we felt hurt. We felt hopeless.

And in those times of trouble, we need love! And sometimes that love is a soft place to land. A tender place where we're nurtured and cared for, with arms around us just reassuring us everything's going to be okay. And sometimes, in those tough times, that love needs to be firm. And, a little more figuratively, a kick-in-the-pants kind of love! [Congregation laughs]

Reminds me of this mom who was waking up his son who was sleeping. And she called out, "Wake up, son! It's time to go to school!" And he yells out, "Mom, I don't want to go to school!" And his mom says, "Give me two reasons why you don't want to go to school." And he said, "Number one is: all the children hate me. And two is: all the teachers hate me." And the mom says, "I'm sure that's not true; you have to go to school." And he says, "Give me two reasons why I should go to school." And she says, "One is: you're 55 years old!" [Congregation laughs] "Two: you're the principal!" [Congregation laughs and applauds] So sometimes love [laughs] needs to be soft, and then sometimes it needs to be tough!

And I love the word ... I love how he used "perhaps" love. "Perhaps love is like a resting place. Perhaps love is like a shelter. Perhaps love is like ... Perhaps ... This idea of perhaps means, like, to explore: to be open to the possibilities of the dimensions, the dynamics and the power of love. Because there are different aspects of love that we feel at different times in our lives, and different ways to be loved that will touch us at different times.

Sometimes someone – just a look and a smile – can be so reassuring that it makes a difference and you feel loved. Sometimes it's validation. Sometimes it's acceptance or appreciation. You know, there are all kinds of ways that we experience and express and feel love. And I think that's what this is connecting with! There are different ways. There's no right way to love. That each moment, each person, each situation calls for a different way to express and receive love. But all of the forms of love are good! And that takes us to the next line:

The memory of love will bring you home

That love, when it touches us in that place, it reminds us – brings us home. To me, brings us home: back to ourselves. So that love in ourselves that we don't always feel that is there. We are created in the image and likeness of God, which means we are created in the image and likeness of love. That we are an expression of love. That love is in us, and it is unlimited, and it's not running out. We're not running out of love! Although, love is always there; we just don't always remember it. That's why the memory of love will bring us home. Because it's there; we just forget!

Anybody ever say or think, "I've got no love in my life." "I have no one to love." "I don't have enough love." "I need more love." "Love is missing." Now, is that true? Is love really gone? Is it missing? Is it not enough? Or is it always there, but we don't always feel it? We don't always remember it? And we don't always connect to it?

You know, one of the common things is – sometimes we don't have a boyfriend, a girlfriend, a spouse – we think, "There's not enough love in my life." But the truth is: there's a whole lot of love still! Love of

our family, love of our friends, love of our neighbors, love of our co-workers ... We have a lot of love! But we don't always see it. And we need to actually remember it.

We are more loved than we realize. We are more cherished. We are more admired. We make more of a difference than we realize. We are loved in amazing and wonderful ways! We just need to remember it.

One of my favorite Buddhist sayings is this. It says, *"It doesn't matter how many times you forget. It's how many times you remember."* We're all going to forget! We're going to go off course here and there. It's how many times you get back! How many times you remember! That love is within me; love is all around me. That people love me! That we are expressions of love.

The truth is: you are an expression of love! And you are so loved! You are an expression of love, and you are so loved! Turn to the person on your left and your right and say, *"You are an expression of love and you are so loved!"* [Congregation murmuring] Okay, I said say the line; I didn't say start a conversation! [Congregation laughs] *"He said lovingly ..."* [Rev. Maraj and congregation laugh] So ...

And that is absolutely the truth! That love doesn't go away; it doesn't vanish or disappear. You don't run low on it; it's just we don't feel it. And that's why those different forms of love remind us of that love. It brings us home to that center and essence of love within ourselves.

The second verse says this. It says:

*Perhaps love is like a window; perhaps an open door
It invites you to come closer; it wants to show you more*

And I just love that! It invites you to come closer; it wants to show you more. And that whole idea is really about the expansive nature of love: the unlimited nature. It wants to show you more, because there's so much more! And I love the idea of the window and the open door, because the open door really represents an open heart. I ask you: How open is your heart?

I was at a workshop, and they mentioned something about life after death. And they said that, when you die, you get asked two questions. The first one is: What did you learn? And the second one is: Did you increase your capacity to love?

So when we die, there is a final exam, apparently. [Congregation laughs] And I'm giving you the two questions now to prepare. And we could even ask ourselves that question right now! So what have you learned so far about life? And then the question is: Have you – or are you – increasing your capacity to love?

I believe that, every moment of our lives, love is calling us to expand our love. To expand our capacity to love. To expand our hearts. So right now in your life, what would you say – what dimension and aspect of love – is life calling you to open to? How is life calling you to love bigger right now? And what is love calling you to let go? What is love calling you to hold on to? What is love calling you to open up to?

And sometimes we think, *"Well, I don't know if I'll know what the right answer is."* And the fact is: you will. Shakespeare put it this way in a play called *Measure for Measure*. He said, *"Go to thy bosom, knock there, and ask the heart what it doth know."* And what he's saying is: your heart knows. Your heart knows the answers. Most of the questions in our lives we say, *"Oh, I just don't know what to do."* We do. And especially if we go to our heart and listen, our heart knows. Sometimes we don't want to know; sometimes we don't want to trust the answer, and don't like the answer. But I think there is more – and we'd all agree – there is more inner knowledge and inner wisdom, and our heart really, really knows the truth if we turn to it and listen.

And so this idea that this *"Perhaps love is like an open door"* invites us into the question and the exploration of: Where in my life is that door closed? Where in my life is my heart closed? Where in my life am I afraid to open up my heart fully?

Somebody once said your heart is kind of like an umbrella; it tends to work best when it's open. And it's really the truth! And it's so easy – when we get hurt and when we get scared – to just close off our heart. Nobody wants to be hurt!

Here are four ways to open up our hearts.

The first one is to open your heart to a deeper level of love than you've allowed yourself to experience. When our heart is broken or we feel hurt, it's easy to close off. It's easy to withdraw. It's easy to withhold and pull back. And so the question is: Are you willing to trust and risk your heart for love? Are you willing to be more vulnerable and more honest? More authentic? And show more of all of you, so more and all of you will be more fully accepted and loved?

We think that it's a risk to put our heart out there. It's a bigger risk not to. Because we rob ourselves of love and fulfillment and all the things that we want. A friend of mine once said to me – he said – “*I want you to hold an intention for me.*” I said, “*What?*” He said, “*I want you to affirm me being wildly in love!*” And it got me excited just hearing him say it about himself! And it brought to me an idea. What is your intention for love? So if you're in one, what is your intention to deepen that love? To have more intimacy or honesty or joy or nurturing or care? And if you're not in one, what would your intention be of what you'd like to feel and enjoy and experience and create?

And I love that idea that “*Perhaps love is like a window.*” And you know that expression of, like, “*a window of time*”? The reality is: while love is eternal, these bodies aren't eternal. There's a window of time that we get to express and experience love. So there's a bigger risk in not doing it ... because we may run out of time in these physical bodies. We don't want to regret not loving. We don't want to look back and say, “*Oh, I wish I had said ...*” “*I wish I had done ...*” Mark Twain said the greatest regrets we have in our lives are not the things we do – not the things we say – but the things that we don't do and don't say. The things we wish we did, and wish we said.

That window of time ... While I'm saying it is – it's got a certain limit to it – it's also, in a way, never too late, too. A couple of years ago – I think I've mentioned – I did a wedding for a gentleman 85 years old. He was a bit of a cradle-robber: she was only 70. [*Congregation laughs*] And I will tell you: at that ceremony, they was as silly as 25- and 26-year-olds in love. Because that's how amazing love is. It lifts your heart and your spirit. It'll bring immense amounts of joy. It is an amazing and powerful thing.

I know somebody, at 65 – she'd been married a couple of other times. With a third marriage – 65. Best marriage she ever had! Passed away at 80, but those were 15 years of some of the happiest of her life. At 65! In a way, it's not too late to love and to find a deeper level of love.

And so that's the first one: open up to a deeper intimate experience of love.

The second one is to love your “exceptions.” The Buddhist definition of love is to care for the well-being of all living things without exception. I know we all love a lot of people in our lives. And I know we have a few “exceptions.” [*Congregation laughs*] And so it's really about loving the exception. It's easy to love who you love. But can you love the exception? The one that ticks you off? The one who may have mistreated you or hurt somebody you love? The person that you hold some resentment towards, that you have a grudge? That you just don't like? And the question is: Can you open your heart and love bigger than you have loved before?

And I'm not talking about going and having lunch with them. I'm talking about an inner change, within ourselves. And sometimes you can't go all the way from disliking someone to sending them love and blessings. But the first step would be: is to clean our hearts, and to get rid of some of the upset and hurt that's in our heart.

There's a wonderful line in Psalm 51, Verse 10. And it says, “*Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me.*” Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me. Thinking of that person that might press your buttons, can you really go that place and say, “*Create in*

me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me?" And let God's love wash over you? You don't need to know how to do it; you just need to be willing to do it, and let God cleanse you.

And then, when you get to that place, the next step would be: send them blessings of peace and love. And just pray for them: God's will. Because God's will is the best. You don't have to get into their business, and start thinking of things. Just send a good intention that God's will and good will be done for them. And you know what? Sometimes you think it's all that for that one person, and they don't deserve it. No, no! When you do that for that one person, guess what? It frees you and helps you love all people better! It makes a difference to love your exceptions.

The third one is to love your fine self ... because you are fine! And you are divine! And sometimes most of us look at ourselves and we see deficiencies. We want this part to be bigger; that part to be smaller. This part to be moved to a different location. [*Congregation laughs*] We have all kinds of different things! We judge ourselves. We beat ourselves up. We measure ourselves against impossible standards.

Alan Cohen said the first and foremost responsibility we have is to love ourselves: that we are the vehicle through which love and light and goodness comes. And if we can't love this body temple, created by God – that is so unique and amazing, not another person like us! We have talents and abilities and gifts that nobody could share with the world but us! And to not be proud or accepting or loving and honoring and appreciative of who we are – not feeling good in our skin ... I mean, this is something we all struggle with. Everybody has got some level of not fully loving and accepting themselves. You are fine! You absolutely deserve your love!

The final one is to love everyone. You know, sometimes we don't think of this: our human family. But it is our human family. When the Lord's Prayer says "*Our Father,*" it exactly means that! Our Father. That we are all brothers and sisters. That we are all connected; we're not separate. We shouldn't be thinking of ourselves that way! To go to that higher God perspective and see our oneness and connection: to me, that is the full expression.

Anthony de Mello, the Jesuit priest, said that if you're not loving everybody equally, you ain't loving! Now, that's a harsh standard! But I get what he's saying! Is to wish well for all of humanity. To wish our human family the highest and best. Not just us; it's not an "us and them." It's an us. And it's a powerful and important thing.

And we rob ourselves of levels of love by not being inclusive in the way that we love. And again, you're never going to meet or know those people, but to send blessings of good wishes for all people: it is a powerful, healing thing for ourselves. For our communities, our country and our world.

How many people remember Dr. Leo Basaglia? Remember him? I used to watch him on PBS all the time; my mom was crazy about the guy. So he was a professor at USC, and he was really moved because this young man committed suicide. And it really devastated him: that here was this young man, full of life and potential. Felt so alone – felt so unhappy, felt so disconnected and unloved – that he killed himself. And so he developed a class called "Love." "Love 101," or something. And a lot of people started taking this class. Because he wanted people to get: you've got this love in you; share it! Express it! Connect with other people with it! Celebrate it!

He was one of the first people that promoted the health of hugging. And he said you need five to survive; eight to maintain; and 12 to thrive. With Covid, we've got our work cut out for us, catching back up! [*Congregation laughs*] So ... So one of the things that he said that I really love ... He said, "*Don't miss love. Because, if you miss love, you miss life. So don't miss it.*"

You know, there's always enough love. There's always an abundance of love, just waiting for our heart to open to allow it to come forth. That, even in our dark times and our troubles and feeling our most alone, we just need to remember that that love is in us. That love is our home. That we were created in love. And that memory of love will reconnect and awaken our hearts, and it will see us through.

So what makes life fulfilling? Perhaps love.

God bless you all!

[Congregation applauds]

MEDITATION

Rev. Lori Fleming: I invite you to close your outer eyes. To take in a deep, cleansing breath, and release it slowly. To make yourself comfortable in your seat. And take in another mindful breath. And, as you release it, begin to move your awareness within. Breathing in and breathing out. Relaxing the body. Relaxing the mind. And moving into the center of your being: into our very souls. Into that quiet, still place within. Into our heart space.

As we feel the presence of the Divine within, recognizing that God is love. And that love is all there is. And that we are spiritual beings who have come here to spread God's unconditional love across the planet. To love ourselves completely. To love each other fully. To love those we know; to love those we don't know. To love those that are like us, and to love those who are different than we are. Because love is all there is. And the more we open our hearts to God's unconditional love, the more we experience God's light in us: lifting us up out of the old. Finding new ways to be God's hands and feet. To be Spirit personified right here, right now. Because love is all there is, and love is what heals us at depth.

We feel God's love in every part of our body: vitalizing every cell; illuminating us within; and allowing us to rise into consciousness of a higher, finer, more perfect unconditional love. And so we take just a few moments, as we move more deeply into the silence, to feel the presence of God's love within.

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude as we accept your love for us deeply and fully. We know that we are here to share that love with everyone, and we do so. Thank you, God, for all of our blessings. Thank you for being here among us, and in us, and as us and through us. Thank you for lifting us up out of the old into a new consciousness. Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And it is so. Amen.

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