

THE HEALING OF LOVE

Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2023

Rev. Richard Rogers

Okay, so here's the question: Would you be willing to love in a greater way, not just during the holidays, but as you move into the new year? Would you be willing to become a greater presence for love on the planet?

Because I truly believe that love is the only thing that's going to heal our world. We've tried power. Like, and we've tried power so many times, right? That we pretty much know moving power around from one person or one group or one institution or one organization never really has an impact on healing the planet. And the only thing that really becomes transformative is love. The only thing that truly makes a difference is when we love.

And love -- and truly loving -- can be a very scary activity. Because when we really love, we open our heart. Because, in reality, it's not really us loving at all. The reality is it's God loving through us. And all we are is a channel. But for love to become real, it first has to be real in each one of us. Like you can't love another more than you're willing to hold in yourself. You actually have to be willing to open to love right where you are, and then open your heart and allow love to flow through you because that's the only way that we ever truly make a difference.

So if you look at the level that you love now, do you think you're doing it at rockstar level? Do you think you're doing it as mildly adequate? Or is this a growth opportunity for you? [Congregation laughs] Right? Because for most of us ... How many of you have been hurt in a relationship or in love? Right? How many of you? have ever in the process of being hurt said, "I will never open my heart again?" Nobody? Nobody in this room has ever said that? We've five honest people; thank you very much. [Congregation laughs]

Because the reality is: sometimes love hurts. Sometimes we get disappointed, sometimes we get betrayed, sometimes all kinds of things happen. And oftentimes when we don't get enough love in our life, the takeaway from that experience is, "*I'm just gonna keep my heart closed.*" And what if tonight, and throughout this holiday season, you make a conscious intention to live with a wide-open heart? To love in a bigger way? To love in all the ways that God put you in the earth to love?

Isaiah 43:19: "*For behold, I will do a new thing and now it shall spring forth and ye have not known it. I will even make a way in the wilderness, a river in the desert.*"

I absolutely believe that sometimes in our life, the love that we have moving through our life can feel like a desert. It can feel like a pretty dry, cranky little place within our heart. And what if tonight you are willing to open your heart all the way and let love flow?

You want to practice? Now, what's interesting about what we're about to do -- and I've done this for you. for groups all over the country ... What we're about to do is to prove a spiritual principle. And what I mean by that is: I'm going to invite you to literally open your heart. Now ... [laughs] Am I talking about your physical heart or your spiritual heart? [Congregants laugh] I don't want anybody to open their heart. physical heart. This is not ... No! Right?

This is going to be a spiritual experiment. You're gonna open your heart and you're gonna feel the difference in energy when your heart is open and when it's closed. And you're gonna say, well, I can feel that? Yes, most people can. Most people can feel the difference when their heart is open and energy -- love -- is flowing through them, and when their heart is closed. And to me, that proves a spiritual life,

right? That love is the only thing that you can literally physically feel. It's the only spiritual quality that you can literally feel moving through you, right?

So, if you have someone or something that you love, I want you to think ... I want you to put your hands on your chest, and I want you to think or feel of someone you love. And just feel what it feels like when your heart is open. And if no one springs to mind, you can think of a puppy or a kitten or whatever you have. And I want you to feel what it feels like to love.

Now I want you to think of somebody who just bugs the heck out of you. [Congregation laughs] Right? And I want you to feel how quickly your heart closes. Someone that you like to judge; somebody you know is just no good. Like, maybe a political person or maybe a neighbor; maybe even a family member that you just have some issues with. And I want you to feel the difference. I want you to see if you can literally feel your heart open and the difference when your heart closes.

And the difference is judgment, right? The moment you judge, your heart closes. But that heart -- which isn't a physical heart; it's a spiritual heart that, for most of us, is in the center of our chest -- that spiritual heart has the capacity to open in enormous ways. Okay?

Let's do it one more time. I want you to think of someone you love and just feel how much you can just open your heart to them. I want you to just feel this radiant love coming through you. And again, I want you to close it. Feel the difference. And open it again.

Now, you ready? I'm gonna keep going. Some of you have now blissed out! Like, you're now like so happy! Your heart's open; it's good!

Now, what I want you to see is: Who has control over your heart? Right? Is it the person that you get mad at? Never! They literally do not have control over your heart. You are the only one that gets to decide whether your heart is open or closed, and how big your heart is open.

And it takes bravery; it takes courage; it takes determination; it takes practice to live with a wide-open heart. And there will be people that tell you that you are stupid for living with a wide-open heart. Because they are convinced it's setting you up to be hurt.

Now, I want you to clearly hear me say tonight that you are going to get hurt. But what happens for most of us when we get hurt in love? We close our heart. So now, when we get hurt in love and we close our heart, where's the pain? Is the pain inside of us or outside of us? It's inside of us! So we get hurt and we close our heart, and so where does the pain have to go? It stays right there; there's no place for it to go. So when we close our heart in pain, it seals it in forever. Like we have people that are carrying pain around for 70, 80, 90 years, because they were hurt once. And they've been dragging that pain into every situation.

The way you heal from pain is not close your heart. I know it seems counterintuitive! Because it is the agreed behavior that, when you're hurt, you go away; you close your heart; and you sit with a closed heart. That's the way to create and make sure that the pain is everlasting. It makes no sense.

What I want you to see tonight is that, as we celebrate this third week in Advent, that our job is to recommit to love. And love is hard. It is messy. It is sometimes difficult. And, yet, it is our superpower. It is the way that we heal and lift ourselves up. It is the way that we heal and lift up those around us. And it is a problem that most of us are loving intellectually, not with an open heart.

Do you know that many people think they're being loving, and their hearts closed? They actually think they're being loving, right? Because they think loving thoughts. But it's not love. Love does not happen until your heart is open.

Now, my wife hates this analogy, I love this analogy, so you're gonna hear it anyway. [Congregants laugh] You can email her and she'll say, "*Richard, why did you do that?*" And I'll say, "*Because it's such a great analogy!*" Right? So, I don't know how I'm gonna say it.

All right. Do you think thinking about kissing or kissing ... which do you think is better? [Congregants: "*Kissing!*"] [Congregant: "*Now, come on!*"] [Laughs] Right? I think thinking about kissing is nice. Like, you read it in a book: the couple's kissing and it's like, "*Oh, isn't that sweet?*" Right? You think about kissing as nice, but if you think thinking about kissing is better than kissing, you have never really been kissed. [Congregants laugh] You haven't! Like there's a level of a kiss where your toes naturally curl up in your shoes. [Congregants laugh]

And if you have not had that experience, right? Thinking about it seems like a good idea. But when you've really been kissed; I mean, bam! Kissed! Right? When you've been kissed, you want that. [Congregants laugh] You just don't want to read about it, right? You just don't want to talk about it. You want the juice, right? [Congregants laugh]

And that's like love! When you've really been deeply, profoundly loved, you don't want to think about love. You don't want to talk about love. You want to love, because that's where the juice is. And you know that, if you love – if you have the courage to open your heart all the way -- that magic happens; miracles happen; people are transformed.

Last week I gave you a bar commercial. I'm now going to Amazon. It's a slippery slope, but I'm going to Amazon. [Congregants laugh] Let's shoot the commercial up there.

[Shows 60-second Amazon commercial, "Joy Ride," which shows three older women in a story about lifelong friends reviving the joy of sledding— all thanks to a flash of inspiration one had to put a seat pad on their sleds.]

Now, I think that's love! My definition of love is: when I love someone, I want them to be happy. That's my definition. When I want somebody's unconditional happiness -- whether I'm in it or out of it -- when I just want them to be happy, that's my definition of love. And I think as we practice loving each other from that place -- where you just want them to be happy.

You know, most of you some of you know that that my path to ministry came through youth ministry. And when I was in my early 20s, I worked with teenagers and that ... When I went into ministry that's where I thought my path was; I thought I was gonna be a youth pastor. And then I had an experience that kind of changed the direction. But that's where I came from right? Working with kids is where I came from. And it's always been important to me and it's really been kind of the thing that just helped me feel solid.

And there was one young man who was from Texas. And I would put on these weekends for kids through the Y.O.U. And this young man from Texas came and he was about 6'2". He had about a 12-inch dyed black Mohawk; eye makeup; and all black leather. So he wanted to look as scary as possible, right? I mean, that was his thing. He had big old Frankenstein boots on. And he looked scary! He wanted to look scary. Like, that was his thing. thing.

And one of the things that I just loved about working with these kids is I didn't want anything from them. Like, I literally needed nothing from them. They would come in and I could just love them, because I didn't have to take them home. [Congregants laugh] I wasn't responsible for them. I didn't even have to feed them, other than the weekend. It was like this pure thing, right? It was like this pure experience.

So they would come in and I would just get to love on them all weekend. And I create experiences where they would love on each other. And it was just beautiful, right?

So one weekend, after about a year of this kid coming to all my events, he shows up and I didn't recognize him. He was in tennis whites with a little preppy white-collar, pulled-up shirt and a preppy little white sweater and his little white tennis shorts and his little white tennies and his little white socks. And his haircut was combed and looked normal. And I didn't recognize him.

And finally he said, *"Do you know who I am?"* And I said, *"No, I don't think we've met."* And he goes, *"I'm"* I'm not gonna say his name. *"I'm {Bing}."* And I'm like, *"No you're not."* [Congregants laugh] And he goes, *"Yeah, I am."* And I said, *"Holy moly! Well, what happened?"* He said, *"Well, I'm just trying this one out for a while."*

Right? It was just another personality he was trying out. And he wasn't sure if he was gonna keep this one or not. But he just felt so loved that he could try out different ways of showing up to see which way -- was it gonna work for him in the best way that he wanted to be.

And I want you to see that, over and over again, love sets us free. Love restores us. Love gives us the opportunity to be the best version of us. Love calls us to be more than we've ever been before. Love gives us the courage to fly. Love is the thing that heals all of humanity. But we are the only ones that are gonna do it.

See, if we could get one person to just come in perfectly and love us, it would be fantastic. But it's never gonna work that way! For love to be made real -- for the love of God to be real -- we're the ones that are gonna have to give it to each other. To accept it for ourselves and then share it with those around us.

And every time we become the place where love lives, the probability of those around us being profoundly healed goes up incredibly. Like you're the one! You're the messenger! And as you love someone, their life gets better. They become more loving, and then they give it to another and another and another. And that's the only way we're ever going to heal this planet -- is when love becomes real.

And you can do it. I can do it. And there's a million reasons not to do it. Sometimes it's scary. Sometimes we don't want to be on the hook. Sometimes we don't want to be that vulnerable. But I want you to see that your heart is connected to the infinite love of God. **And to the degree that you open your heart, love wins. Love heals.**

Every day you get to decide: Are you going to go through this day with a closed heart and play it safe, and hope you don't get hurt? Or are you going to say, *"I'm in! I'm going to open my heart all the way. I'm going to love everybody that God puts in front of me. And I'm just going to see how well I do."*

There's three things that Jesus taught over and over again. He taught to love. Don't judge. And when you mess up on the first two, forgive. That's it! That's his whole gospel in three points.

Now, there's much better Bible, spiritual teachers that can teach the 47 points of Jesus' theology. Three things: Love. Don't judge. And when you mess up, forgive. That's it!

So take a breath. Will you pray with me?

And I want you to open your heart all the way tonight. I want you to stretch it and allow the infinite love of God to fill you as never before. That love is real. And that, as we allow love in, it makes our life better.

So open your heart and let all the love that God has for you in. in. Let it just heal you and bless you and transform you. And then, when you feel full -- when you feel good, when you feel loved -- open it to all those in front of you. Love them. Not because they deserve it ... Not even because you know them; you may not know them at all! But just keep your heart open and feel the power of love at work in your life.

In the name and through the power of the living Christ, we give thanks for all the ways that love heals us; for all the ways that love makes us stronger; for all the ways that love creates miracles in our life and in the world. We say thank you God. And so it is. Amen.

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