

High Fidelity - Love and Commitment UCC Feb. 17, 2008

Sermon by UCC Minister Rev. Lori Staubitz

It takes a bit of the "hopeless romantic" in all of us to do this work of ministry...that is to say, to hang in there, to keep on, keep'n on, even when the going gets tough and the road gets weary.... Maybe that's why on Friday nights, after a long week, there are two things I love to do...dance around the kitchen listening to Italian tenors and watch a romantic comedy. I know, some of you may be shaking your heads and secretly adding me to the list of "helpless romantics"....I confess, I have seen *Gone with the Wind* and *African Queen* more than once.... Perhaps it is the undying spirit of hope that is so inspirational; that in spite of it all, love wins out...or at least that is the way these movies are SUPPOSED to end. So you might not be surprised to know that this sermon title comes from March 2000 **Movie High Fidelity**

John Cusak- Rob, is a record store owner and a compulsive list maker, he recounts his top five breakups, including the one in progress. It is a comedy about fear of commitment, hating your job, falling in and out of love... Rob is faced with the fact that he is the "king of breaking up" and if he doesn't rectify this dilemma soon he will end up alone.

-excerpt from review of High Fidelity
by [Dean Kish](#)

After his most recent breakup, Rob begins to reassess his romantic life. He starts to re-categorize his album collection. (Not alphabetically or chronologically, but *autobiographically!* This way he can tell who he bought the record for, where he was at that stage in his life, and which specific heartbreak each song references. It would be sad if it weren't so funny.) Rob even has his breakups listed, in top-5 fashion, most painful at the top.

Unfortunately, this is the case for most everyone of us... Whether it is the loss of love, friendship, jobs, or for many of us, loss of community...our hearts are broken, again and again and again. "Along with language, romance may be one of the hardest skills we'll ever acquire." ¹

But we are born lovers.

"Even before we know how to turn on the charm, touch and chemistry are bonding us firmly to our caregivers-and bonding them to us." "Within the first months of life, babies already know how to flirt-a survival mechanism to encourage caretakers to love and protect them. Getting that protection teaches the quid pro quo, that love requires both give and take." ²

We don't know our character Ro, but we do know from the onset that he is forever moving from one relationship to the next without moving to the deeper level of commitment with any relationship. This of course is typical of young adulthood, but our guy Rob no longer qualifies as an adolescent...although his level of understanding relationships suggests otherwise.

"In an effort to cleanse himself of his 'romantic loser' status, he goes about contacting his earlier lovers to see exactly what it was that doomed these relationships" – excerpt from movie review by [Scott Weinberg](#)

His experiences are not unlike our own when we are first attracted to someone or something... We too have had many relationships, no matter how brief where we fall head over heels into :

- Attraction or the Liking stage; a feeling of closeness, understanding, support and affection but no commitment or passion. Mark of many friendships, neighborly relations or involvement in organizations.

Or we jump off the deep end into:

- Infatuation: Lots of instant passion that can end as quickly as it begins...with no intimacy or commitment.

¹ The Science of Romance; Tiffany Sharples, Time Jan 8, 2008

² Ibid.

Or deeper yet...we delve into a relationship marked by

- Romance: marked by both passion and intimacy but commitment is uncertain.

Romantics are driven by a sense of hope and vision. However, we run into trouble, when we become too quickly disillusioned by a relationship when it starts to fall short of our imagination. A Mature Love is grounded in much more than immediate self satisfaction.

- Consummate love: Love relationships with high commitment, intimacy and passion.
- Compassionate Love: Intimacy and commitment are high... can be witnessed in long term dedication to a relationship or cause.

However, commitment alone can lead to lifeless, Empty Love if it is based only on a sense of duty or commitment without passion or intimacy.

Mature love requires passion, intimacy and commitment if it is to endure suffering and loss

Loss of innocence: Loss of illusion:

The breaking point in the movie doesn't come until the very end. You begin to believe that this guy is doomed to never move beyond the introductory stages of relationship to anyone or anything. He hates his job, he hates his life, he is unsatisfied with everyone who has disappointed him in love. Until, he has an epiphany. After interviewing his top five, he starts to realize a pattern.

A Mature love humbles us out of our own illusions of perfection. It is a love that demands that we open our eyes to our own imperfections.

It is a love that knows vulnerability and risk as well compassion, understanding and forgiveness. Some of his last lines go something like this.... You see, I didn't understand that I would have to repeat the same pattern over and over again. I found out that no matter who I am with, I will have to move beyond the point where I am disappointed to really know what love is.

Unitarian Minister James Luther Adams wrote these words on such a love as this, "Universal Love, or Love of God, then is the giving of oneself to the power that holds the world together, and that, when we are tearing it apart, persuades us to come to ourselves and start on new beginnings; "" "Through this love which is a self-giving to a process of transformation; all persons, in their relation to each other and in their diversity, become mutually supporting and enhancing rather than mutually impoverishing. Here the antagonism between egoism and altruism is transcended in the devotion to the good of others, which is at the same time the fulfillment of the good of the self. In this relationship, one loses (the finite sense of self to find and live out a greater sense of relationship and identity) "This kind of love however, promises no rosy path "

(It demands much from us, it demands an integrity of spirit, ability to withstand loss of innocence, grief and yes, even suffering for a higher good, it requires humility to learn and grow and forgive and begin anew, with genuine concern for others.)-paraphrase

We are people who have loved and lost.

We are lovers who have given our best and at times it has not been good enough.

We have counted on others. We have trusted, only to be disillusioned and disappointed...

But that is not all.....

We are learning that love has a cost.

As Unitarian Universalist we are called to a High Fidelity.

We are no "easy date" ...for like Rob, many come to discover that the commitment to learning, self awareness and change along with a commitment to love and justice are necessary tenants of this progressive faith tradition.

Prohibitions on love stain the course of our human history. We know that it was not long ago that interfaith and interracial marriages were banned. We stood on the side of love when it was obvious that love knows no limits and will defy the boundaries of race, religion, class and culture.

Once again, we are being asked to stand with the oppressed; to act for those whom intimacy, passion and commitment are denied in the presence of the law.

Hundreds of Marylanders descended on Annapolis to Rally and Lobby for LGBT Civil Rights on one of the coldest nights this winter.

Equality Maryland, the state's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) civil rights organization, held its annual rally and Lobby Day in Annapolis on Monday, Feb. 11th.

For the first time in Maryland, same-sex marriage advocates have the opportunity to work for a bill—the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act--that guarantees all Marylanders the right to civil marriage, instead of fighting a bill that restricts that fundamental right. Specifically, the bill defines a marriage between two people (as opposed to a man and a woman) as valid, and it affirms that no religion or clergy would be required to perform any marriage in violation of the freedom of religion.

At this time we are being asked to stand on the side of love once again, only this time, we will need to stand with those who love and share a single gender.

What kind of love will be required of us?

There is a love that can transcend all our personal bias and limitations and call us forward into deeper relationship with all others.

Universal Love: Love, Commitment and Passion that extend beyond the constructs of self, family, nation, class, race, gender or even species...the highest form of love.

It has its foundations in the individual heart, mind, body and spirit but can be best manifested in and through a loving community.

Closing Reading: Bible

1 Corinthians 13

1 If I speak in the tongues^[a] of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,^[b] but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails..

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.