

**Love: the practice of vulnerability**  
UU Community Church of Santa Monica  
Small Group Ministry  
September 2014

**Chalice Lighting**

All you need is Love Love Love is all you need  
- John Lennon

**Sharing Silence** 3 minutes

**On Our Hearts** 20 minutes

**Covenant and Ground Rules**

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group;
- to let the leader know if I will be absent or need to quit;
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others;
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others;
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart;
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, or giving advice;
- to ask questions gently and only if necessary;
- and to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn.

- Christine Robinson and Alicia Hawkins, *Heart to Heart* (adapted)

**Reading**

Wandering Around an Albuquerque Airport Terminal  
*Naomi Shihab Nye*

After learning my flight was detained 4 hours,  
I heard the announcement:  
If anyone in the vicinity of gate 4-A understands any Arabic,  
Please come to the gate immediately.  
Well — one pauses these days. Gate 4-A was my own gate. I went there.  
An older woman in full traditional Palestinian dress,  
Just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing loudly.  
Help, said the flight service person. Talk to her. What is her  
Problem? we told her the flight was going to be four hours late and she  
Did this.  
I put my arm around her and spoke to her haltingly.  
Shu dow-a, shu- biduck habibti, stani stani schway, min fadlick,  
Sho bit se-wee?  
The minute she heard any words she knew — however poorly used -

She stopped crying.  
She thought our flight had been cancelled entirely.  
She needed to be in El Paso for some major medical treatment the  
Following day. I said no, no, we're fine, you'll get there, just late,  
Who is picking you up? Let's call him and tell him.  
We called her son and I spoke with him in English.  
I told him I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane and  
Would ride next to her — southwest.  
She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it.  
Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and  
Found out of course they had ten shared friends.  
Then I thought just for the heck of it why not call some Palestinian  
Poets I know and let them chat with her. This all took up about 2 hours.  
She was laughing a lot by then. Telling about her life. Answering  
Questions.  
She had pulled a sack of homemade mamool cookies — little powdered  
Sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts — out of her bag –  
And was offering them to all the women at the gate.  
To my amazement, not a single woman declined one. It was like a  
Sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the traveler from California,  
The lovely woman from Laredo — we were all covered with the same  
Powdered sugar. And smiling. There are no better cookies.  
And then the airline broke out the free beverages from huge coolers –  
Non-alcoholic — and the two little girls for our flight, one African  
American, one Mexican American — ran around serving us all apple juice  
And lemonade and they were covered with powdered sugar too.  
And I noticed my new best friend — by now we were holding hands –  
Had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing,  
With green furry leaves. Such an old country traveling tradition. Always  
Carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere.  
And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and thought,  
This is the world I want to live in. The shared world.  
Not a single person in this gate — once the crying of confusion stopped  
– has seemed apprehensive about any other person.  
They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women too.  
This can still happen anywhere.  
Not everything is lost.

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

- Gospel of Matthew

Love, like truth and beauty, is concrete. Love is not fundamentally a sweet feeling; not, at heart, a matter of sentiment, attachment, or being "drawn toward." Love is active, effective,

a matter of making reciprocal and mutually beneficial relation with one's friends and enemies.

Love creates righteousness, or justice, here on earth. To make love is to make justice. As advocates and activists for justice know, loving involves struggle, resistance, risk. People working today on behalf of women, blacks, lesbians and gay men, the aging, the poor in this country and elsewhere know that making justice is not a warm, fuzzy experience. I think also that sexual lovers and good friends know that the most compelling relationships demand hard work, patience, and a willingness to endure tensions and anxiety in creating mutually empowering bonds.

For this reason loving involves commitment. We are not automatic lovers of self, others, world, or God. Love does not just happen. We are not love machines, puppets on the strings of a deity called "love." Love is a choice -- not simply, or necessarily, a rational choice, but rather a willingness to be present to others without pretense or guile. Love is a conversion to humanity -- a willingness to participate with others in the healing of a broken world and broken lives. Love is the choice to experience life as a member of the human family, a partner in the dance of life, rather than as an alien in the world or as a deity above the world, aloof and apart from human flesh.

-Carter Heyward, Episcopal priest

All Universalists agree in believing that the true Christian life consists in possessing, living, and acting the spirit of love, as manifested in the life and teachings of the Divine Master. And however we may fail, or come short of this rule, even our delinquencies admonish us of its purity, and compel us to acknowledge it.

-- Hosea Ballou ("A Short Essay on Universalism," 1849)

### **Questions for consideration**

1. What are some people or things you loved as a child? How did you express that love?
2. How do you know that you are loved – by other people? By God?
3. How is love present in your spiritual life? Is compassion part of your spiritual life?
4. Has there been a time when you felt a connection between love, justice, and power?
5. Western theologians and philosophers have described different kinds of love, including: friendship, passion, compassion, and affectionate love (as between parents and children). Do you remember your first experience of one of these kinds of love? What was that like?

**Sharing** 60 minutes

### **Closing Activity / Reflecting On Our Time Together**

#### **Closing Words**

Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power, at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.

-Martin Luther King, Jr. "Address to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference," 1967