

First Friends Church, a Quaker Meeting  
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett  
April 25, 2021  
Abiding Abundant Love  
1 John 3:16-24

### Reading

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

### Message

Someone asked Ramana Marharshi, “How are we to treat others?” He replied, “There are no others.” Marharshi was a Hindu sage and *jivanmukta*- an enlightened and liberated being; he knew his true self and the Universal Self. We might say he knew and loved God, his neighbor and himself. Another wise man closer to home said, “Every gun that is made, every warship that is launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.” Dwight D. Eisenhower was an Army General before President, but we can see he was influenced by his Mennonite mother. Jesus, a true lover said, “Love one another as I have loved you, and love your enemy.” And his follower, author of the first letter of John wrote, “...let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” Separated by 1900 years, they

spoke out of very different cultural, religious, and socio-political contexts. Yet all spoke Truth. “But what do we do when the person we need to love isn’t lovable?”

Many of you know I volunteer at an Elementary School and read with the students. Education changes but some of the stories we read are centuries old. *The Frog Prince* is dated from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but may be from ancient Rome!<sup>1</sup> In the version we read a princess was throwing a ball higher and higher and it fell in a pond. In order to get it back she had to agree to let a talking frog visit the palace. Speaking dismissively the princess agreed to let him come just to get her ball back. Then the frog kissed her. The princess screamed. The frog turned into a prince.

Ok so what exactly is the lesson here? The students have seen the Disney movie of course so I asked them what they thought. “Don’t play with your ball near a pond” was the most frequent answer- and we agreed not by the street either. “Don’t throw your ball too high,” didn’t seem to quite right. An answer that got closer was “Don’t listen to frogs.” (Which led to discussion: was the story about something that really happened or was it a fable- a story to teach us a lesson.)

Finally I suggested, “Maybe the story is about not paying so much attention to what is on the outside of a person that we miss getting to see and know the inside.” I could tell from their expressions they weren’t quite tracking with me.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://thefairytalescentral.com/the-frog-prince-origins/#:~:text=However%2C%20the%20story%20of%20E2%80%9CThe%20Frog%20Prince%E2%80%9D%20is,traced%20back%20as%20far%20as%20to%20ancient%20Rome.>

“Seeing that someone is short or tall, old or young but taking time to get to know them anyway and become their friend.” That seemed to work. What do you think?

I must note that as I pondered the lesson of the story I noticed something that bothered me. The frog didn't help out of helpfulness. Even worse, he kissed an unwilling princess. (#Me too?) Sure he turned out to be a prince. But that is where the story ended. I am not sure I like the princess or the prince, in human or frog form. At least I am not happy with their behavior and lack of consequences to help them learn to do better. What do we do when we encounter people we don't like?

Karen Tibbals asked a Quaker version of this question in an article. “How can we learn to see that of God in people we dislike?”<sup>2</sup> She says we must first separate people from their values or beliefs. Second, we need a spiritual tool-moral reframing. This starts with our self; learning about our own bias and working to detach from it. Our Understanding through Sharing group is doing this on Thursdays. Then we figure out how we share values or ideas with others and explore ways to reframe our disagreement. We will have begun by being centered and truly listening to them and then they may be able to hear us. Tibbals connects this to communion in meeting for worship, when we open ourselves and listen to each other. My observation is the first step- separating people from their values and beliefs is the most important and difficult step in loving love those we don't

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.friendsjournal.org/how-can-we-learn-to-see-that-of-god-in-people-we-dislike/?utm\\_campaign=mm&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=ak&utm\\_term=16722.33250.v8ZkXp](https://www.friendsjournal.org/how-can-we-learn-to-see-that-of-god-in-people-we-dislike/?utm_campaign=mm&utm_medium=email&utm_source=ak&utm_term=16722.33250.v8ZkXp)

like. And we listening in worship goes beyond listening to Friends' values or ideas, we ask what Spirit is saying and how Spirit is using and leading those who speak.

It is easy to be nice to people you like but how about those who frustrate or irritate you? I confess sometimes I wonder why God called me to be a pastor. I know the most important thing a pastor or a person can do is listen to another. But I get myself so busy and in that moment I run into someone who cannot be concise in storytelling. Then I get impatient and even irritated, especially when I think they are repeating or telling me something I already know. (I am reminded that Carl Jung said "Everything that irritates us about others can lead to an understanding of ourselves.") But when I stop and listen I realize the story or idea may be the same but the reason for telling the story is quite different. There may be a new priority or insight or maybe something I didn't see or understand before. Not only is the story or idea opened up, as well as the person and their life, I gain a different perspective for my own life and work. Spirit speaks to say "what you were doing, planning, and thought needed accomplished was not as important as being present to listen and be part of transformation and learning more about loving others.

Howard Thurman wrote we must want to love. We want to be loved and accepted as we are, yet we want the other to win the right to our acceptance of them. Thurman believes when we want for others what we want for our self we find openings to love mutually, then we can imagine and admire God's miracle in

another. We can give the benefit of the doubt to others. He says we must be willing to be that of God as needed, God's instrument for each other; to respond to and convey it, patient, dedicated, undeterred and unhurried, as long as it takes. It is not a one-time event but a relationship. Being separated or segregated is a disease of the human spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps we can take a hint from an expert on marriage about the truth about how we love those we love. We "...fall in love with the most perfect aspects of each other's personalities. Who wouldn't? Anybody can love the most wonderful parts of another person. But that's not the clever trick... Can you accept the flaws? ...the good stuff is always going to be there and it's always going to be pretty and sparkly." She says we need to "...look at the faults of [people] honestly and say, 'I can work around that. I can make something out of it...'" Perhaps we can try to do the same for those who aren't so lovable. Look for the good and sparkly stuff and admit the not so good stuff is what we learn to work with.<sup>4</sup>

An amazing tool I found from second grade is a breathing meditation called Have Compassion. I'd like to do it briefly with you.

Sit comfortably in your chair and close your eyes. Imagine you are sitting across from a person you dearly love. Breathe in and breathe out. And say to them "may you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be safe, may you be filled joy.

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<sup>3</sup> Howard Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit*, page 124ff

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Gilber, *Committed: A Skeptic makes peace with marriage*.

Now breathe, relax and notice how you are feeling. Now imagine that someone who annoys or irritates you is sitting in the chair. This is someone you may not agree with, may not love or even like. Breathe. Say to them “may you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be safe, may your life be filled with joy.”

Now breathe in and out and wrap your arms around yourself. Now tell yourself “may you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be safe, may your life be filled with joy.”

I think this might be the experience and exercise Jesus told us to do when he said love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Perhaps you have had this experience: When God uses you to care for or love a stranger and it surprises you. Or when your kindness is noticed or appreciated and you think, “Wow what I did is no big deal, it was kind and that’s the lowest common denominator of what we should all be.” Jesus said, “Why do you call me good? God is good!” Humility in its basic form: “Only God is truly good, I am just emulating God, but you can be like me too and love others, even those who seem unlovable.” That is abiding abundant love.