

Choosing to Love
The Rev. Bruce J. Roffey
King City – York Pines United Church
Sunday, October 4, 2026

A commentary on the passage we read today included these words. “We are reminded that love is an action, not just a feeling; love is a commitment and a choice, not just something we ‘fall into.’” When we share in God’s dream we choose to love.

I want to suggest to you that this statement is countercultural. Most people do not believe it and do not act as if love is an action, an act of the will. They act as if love were only an emotion, a feeling, as if love is only the motivator, the driver of our actions and not the actions themselves, as if love carries us along, as if only our hearts are involved and not our strength, our will, our volition, our minds. They, and often we, act as if we can’t decide to love, as if we can’t choose to love, as if love comes upon you from outside rather than inside. And too often we refuse to love because we don’t feel loving.

I remember an episode of *All in the Family* quite a few years ago in which one of the characters, I think Archie Bunker, quoted the marriage vow ending it with these words, “as long as love lasts.” I take you to be my spouse not for as long as we both shall live but for as long as love lasts. I take you to be my spouse as long as I feel like it.

I need to say to you that a marriage built on a commitment like that will not last. In the heat of desires and lusts and against

the challenges and storms which beset long term relationships a marriage built on “feeling like it” won’t last.

While preparing a marriage address some years ago, I came across a marriage sermon which Dietrich Bonhoeffer had written for his own wedding. He wrote it while he was in Flossenbürg prison in Nazi Germany for opposing Hitler. He wrote it while living out the consequences of choosing to love in the midst of an atmosphere of hate. In it he said something which I found quite startling at the time, “Love does not sustain marriage; marriage sustains love.” That is countercultural. How many couples I meet who enter marriage with exactly the opposite viewpoint. The emotions are so high, their feelings for each other run so deep that they are certain that they will never run out of love. Love will sustain them and will sustain their marriage and sustain their relationship forever. Divorce statistics speak otherwise.

In the marriage ceremony one of the questions we ask is a legal question, “Will you take this person to be your spouse?” On the television the answer is “I do.” In real life the answer is “I will.” We know you do. We know how much you feel about each other now. The question is, will you? What are your intentions for the future? The commitment required is not as long as love lasts but as long as you both shall live. The question asked is do you intend to try to make love last by committing to each other in the sacramental act of marriage? Do you choose to love?

I heard a discussion on the radio some years ago comparing

western marriages based on romantic love with arranged marriages. A woman who was in an arranged marriage said quite clearly that she preferred arranged marriages. Those who arrange marriages look for something more reliable than mere emotion. They are wiser and more experienced than the young people and so look for compatibility and potential. And those who enter into arranged marriages do so with a different understanding and different expectations. They don't expect to be Prince Charming and Cinderella. Their expectations are less lofty and more practical. They expect to have to work on their relationship. They must choose to love and when they make that mutual commitment the feeling of love blossoms.

Now I don't want to idolize arranged marriages. Many of them happen for much less lofty ideals than I have mentioned. But I do want to emphasize attitude. Love is a choice. We decide, we choose, to love, and the more we choose to love, the more we love in action, the more we will experience and feel love within ourselves.

The passage we read in Mark's Gospel about the great commandment is repeated in both Matthew and Luke, but each one tells the story slightly differently. In both Matthew and Luke, a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.ⁱ Not so in Mark's version. The scribe, not a lawyer, comes sincerely to enter into dialogue with Jesus. He has been standing on the sidelines listening to Jesus dispute with the Sadducees on a number of topics. He's

impressed. Jesus has answered well and so he enters into dialogue, Which commandment is greatest of all? Jesus answers by combining two commandments as one, Love God and love your neighbour. Love God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.

"You are right, Teacher," agrees the scribe. "Love is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices, all the trappings and façade of religious practice."

Seeing that the scribe also replied wisely Jesus said, "You are not far from the realm of God."

Love is the most important thing. The scribe recognized that. He wasn't far from the realm of God, but he wasn't yet there. He lacked something. He was like the rich man Jesus had encountered earlier.ⁱⁱ Remember him? "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" he asked Jesus. Jesus repeated some of the Ten Commandments. "I have observed those all my life," the man replied. Jesus looked at him and loved him and said out of his love for him, "You lack only one thing, only one. Give all you have to the poor and come, follow me." What happened next? The man's countenance fell and he went away sorrowful. Why? Because he had much to give.

This man and the scribe lacked the same thing. They did not follow Jesus on the way and all the way to the cross. Entering the realm of God is not a matter of agreeing to the right

answers, as important as the search for truth is. It is living, doing and relating in ways that the love of God and love of neighbour inspire, inform and discipline.ⁱⁱⁱ Sharing God's dream means choosing to love.

The question before us then is always how do we put love into action? How do we make love a verb instead of a noun, a deed instead of a feeling?

Ask yourself the question, What do I love? Whom do I love? The answers to those questions are not as self-evident as they might appear. They actually require quite a bit of self-knowledge. One way to approach them is to look at how you spend. How do you spend your time? How do you spend your money?

Many churches I have served have sales, auctions, bazaars and dinners. At Aurora United we called it the Fall event. Knox in Agincourt, which I served last year, is even now preparing for its Fall Fair. The rural congregations I served had fowl dinners serving an all-you-can-eat turkey dinner with all the trimmings to 600 in one evening. These are incredibly impressive events. They are impressive, of course, by the amount of money raised, but especially impressive by the time and energy spent by the people who take part. Whether it's baking cookies and pies, cooking stew or chili for lunch, roasting turkeys, sorting books, carrying merchandise, spending an entire day going from room to room and selling, counting money, welcoming guests, cleaning up

or planning for an entire year in advance, whatever it is it's a work of love, time and energy spent happily and joyfully because they believe in and love their church and its mission and they put their love into action. How they have chosen to spend their time reveals where their heart is.

In the early days of computers, a friend of mine had two computers for each person in his household. He had eight, all the way from an old Sinclair, the granddaddy of home computers to the most up-to-date version going. A new program comes out and he has it. Computers occupy his life and they drain his bank account. Where do you think his heart is? What do you think he loves? How he has chosen to spend his time and money indicates what he has chosen to love.

Where have you chosen to spend your time and your money? What have you chosen to love? Are your priorities in order? Do your choices indicate that you have chosen to share God's dream and to put your love for God and your neighbour into action?

When I first started in ministry, I coordinated the premarriage seminars for the Brock Ministerial. We brought in so-called experts in finance and law and interpersonal relationships to help our couples think about and plan for their marriage, not their wedding, but their marriage. The financial person was a credit counsellor, and he spoke to them about budgeting. The first thing you do is give 10% to the church.

There were some rather startled faces among the couples, even my own. He then explained the commitment of himself and his wife to Christ and the impact that would have on how they spent their money and their time. For them there were three levels in budgeting. The first and primary was their offering to God. That came off the top. The second were the nondiscretionary items like food and housing. The last were the discretionary items. For them loving God had an impact on their lives in very direct ways. Observing how they spent both their time and their money indicated where their priorities were.

By the way he declined the honorarium. His time was offered as part of his commitment to God. Sharing in God's dream he chose to love in specific and concrete ways.

How are you sharing in God's dream? How are you choosing to enact the love you have within your heart? How are you choosing to love in order that God's love might be experienced and nurtured in others? Does how you spend your time express your love? Does your budget and how you spend your money reflect your faith and make love real?

There is a story about a man who once stood before God. His heart was breaking from all the pain and injustice in the world. "Dear God," he cried out, "look at all the suffering, the anguish and distress in your world. Why don't you send help?"

"I did," God responded. "I sent you."^{iv}

Sharing in God's dream. Choosing to love. So may it be for

you and me. So may it be. Amen.

ⁱ Mark 12: 28-34; Matthew 22: 34-40; Luke 10: 25-28.

ⁱⁱ Mark 10: 17-31.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fred B. Craddock, *et al.*, *Preaching Through the Christian Year, Year B*, Trinity Press International, 1993. p. 459.

^{iv} David J. Wolpe, *Teaching Your Children About God*, quoted in Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, *Spiritual Literacy*, Scribner, 1996, p. 327.