

THE SHAPE OF LOVE

All this talk about love. You'd think we were celebrating Valentine's Day! But what's *this* love all about? Is it like the Diana Ross song from the 60's, "You Can't Hurry Love"...(it don't come easy; it's a game of give and take"? That's a Valentine's Day kind of love—a game where there are winners and losers; a game where scores and tallies are kept. It's a love that comes with it an unwritten contract which implicitly owns that if our giving and taking get too out of balance, there will be unspecified consequences. If love becomes too one-sided, the contract can be nullified.

That doesn't seem to be the same kind of love Jesus commands his disciples to have. *There is no greater love than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends.* That's taking it to a whole new level! And that is a pretty scary level. Which one of us is willing to die for it? And soon after this, the disciples all answered that question for themselves as they fled the scene when Jesus was arrested.

But what a relevant and appropriate question for each of us on this sacred evening! St. Clare of Assisi wisely observed, "We become what we love, and who we love shapes what we become." And so the question then becomes, what is the shape of our love? Is it kind of a gerrymandered map that curves and wiggles through demographic communities and regions of the world? Who will be included inside the boundaries and who will be excluded? The political and cultural climate in this country feels as if it lends itself more to a mandate to hate than to love. And the closer we get to the election, the worse it is going to get. Isn't partisanship the very antithesis of love? Why I don't know, but it is very tempting to forget that we are a global community. But I believe the virus has taught us that very lesson. No one is exempt. What each of us does affects everyone else. Perhaps because it is human nature to seek out our own advantage and while hopefully no one gets injured in our pursuit, we can easily turn a blind eye to any collateral damage we might be leaving with our choices. It is

necessary, of course, to love ourselves for we are incapable of loving anyone else if we don't. But where are the boundaries when it comes to the rest of the world? What is the shape of who we are becoming?

Neil deGrasse Tyson takes a telescopic view on the subject: "As grown-ups, dare we admit to ourselves that we have a collective immaturity of view? Dare we admit that our thoughts and behaviors spring from a belief that the world revolves around us? Apparently not. Yet evidence abounds. Part the curtains of society's racial, ethnic, religious, national, and cultural conflicts, and you find the human ego turning the knobs and pulling the levers.

Now imagine a world in which everyone, but especially people with power and influence, hold an expanded view of our place in the cosmos. With that perspective, our problems would shrink—or never arise at all—and we would celebrate our earthly differences while shunning the behavior of our predecessors who slaughtered one another because of them."

We all know, of course, that lots of people besides ourselves need to change their behavior if we are to change the world. But they are all waiting for us to change. So I guess that's not going to work. It would be better if we took the lead. So let us figure out the shape we want our love to take and to do things for people not because of who they are or what they do for us in return, but because of who we are.

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