

Reflection 24-12-08- C Apokis

Can you hear the angels? Messages we need to hear today. Love.

Introduction

Illustration: Asking for Flowers

How do you keep nurturing love? Sally and I have had this phrase *Asking for Flowers!*

A spouse, traditionally the woman, asking for flowers as token of love.

A parent asking the children to visit them more regularly especially on Xmas day!

A friend asking for more time and contact.

A neighbour asking for overhanging trees to be pruned.

Commonwealth Bank asking the opinion and feelings of its customers

Putin asking Zelensky for peace Ukraine.

The person receiving the flowers just feels like well I asked so I got them. The person bringing the flowers is obligated so going through the motions. If as part of love you have to ask for flowers then the inevitable emotional landing point is an empty gesture of love. Let alone if you ask for flowers and you don't get them!

It is in the same tradition: if you're explaining you have already lost the argument.

Love that invites pleases – love that holds on suffocates.

As St Paul affirms in his description – love does not count or tally – it rejoices.

it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

Quote: As Robert Doisneau expressed it

To suggest is to create - To describe is to destroy

***Asking for flowers* does not suggest it describes – does not create but destroys.**

Of course, asking and receiving is part of love – yet we all know times where asking & receiving happen without anyone noticing the asking and receiving - there is love.

This Advent let's have less explaining and describing love – like quoting from Paul!

This Advent season let us rejoice in love that suggests, love that creates

Living a Christian life of Love

The Judeo-Christian tradition is framed by a loving God - a God who is love.

The words of Malachi attest to God's enduring commitment to God's people.

The words of Paul promise so much hope for when we gather as Christians.

...And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight help you to determine what is best.

The problem of love is that it constantly needs to be refreshed in the face of familiarity and faded glories – how do you get there without asking for flowers!

Certainly, I never fail to hear Paul's words on love without feeling aware of what is lacking in my love and on a bad day too often what is lacking in other people's love.

I find myself gasping and grasping for love in a time where war in Ukraine continues its horrors and Syria re-blazes among those who are and have been neighbours.

Rejoicing in Christian Love

I feel like I am fighting a losing battle to avoid despair – so love is the calling today.

Look Up! What're the messages of love we need to hear this Advent Xmas season?

Look In! How are the messages of love landing for you this Advent Xmas season?

Look Out! Which messages of love are worth sharing this Advent Xmas season?

What is Christian love – it is more than a higher standard!

Illustration: Newman! Meeting a nemesis.

I love *Seinfeld* – in fact some of our best times of theological sharing as a family on life, universe and everything was done in front of the TV watching *Seinfeld*. *Seinfeld* has a kind of frenemy – not quite friend nor quite enemy - Newman. We all have Newman's in our life. Maybe we are Newman's in other people's life!

Last year one of our neighbours invited us to Xmas do which doubled as a housewarming gathering after a separation. A lovely and generous gathering of people who were there to rejoice in our neighbour's new phase of life. She also happens to be the daughter of an Anglican Archbishop (Hollingworth). A person that was not fond of me to say the least in a church politics kind of way. Fair to say that things were said and done on both sides that at best meant we were political frenemies with all the vindictive viciousness that good Christians are able to offer! On the same side fighting each other!

Fair to say, over time we have both had our comeuppances – his more public and maybe humiliating than mine – but also fair to say that both of us probably relished and maybe even gloated at each other’s comeuppances more than was good for us.

Well Sally and I should have anticipated that this former Anglican Archbishop, loved father of our neighbour was going to be there. Not only that, he greeted us as long lost and valued frenemies. Sally was kind and welcomed a long and at times awkward conversation with him. Fair to say I was more begrudging and kept my distance – unsure what to do with my feelings of resentment that he could gloss over our troubled past so easily.

After a lovely night we departed and reflected on how tricky that was – yet I could not help but feel that we had all done well enough to suggest a new neural pathway had been created that was in part messy and in part healing.

My feelings screamed he is undeserving of my goodwill and love.

Not sure we were rejoicing in love, but we had walked the tightrope of love – we had not explicitly asked for flowers but flowers were offered and received nonetheless.

Some of you may remember I referred to the documentary on Steve Martin the comedian last year

Illustration: Adventure Steve! (A Documentary of Steve Martin in Two Pieces)

Fair to say Steve Martin and his father had a frustrating relationship. During the documentary he shared how this played out in his life. As some of you may recall he wrote a beautiful piece in the *New Yorker* which I recommend you chase up.

Illustration: The Death of My Father (New Yorker June 9, 2002 by [Steve Martin](#))

“In his death, my father... did something he could not do in life. He brought our family together.

In the early '80s, a close friend of mine, whose own father was killed walking across a street and whose mother committed suicide on Mother’s Day, said that if I had anything to work out with my parents, I should do it now, because one day that opportunity would be over. When I heard this remark, I had no idea that I would ever want to work anything out with them, that, in fact, there was anything to work out at all. But it stewed in my brain for years, and soon I decided to try and get to know my parents. I took them to lunch every Sunday I could, and would goad them into talking.

It was our routine that after I drove them home from our lunches, my mother and father, now in their 80s, would walk me to the car. I would kiss my mother on the cheek and my father and I would wave or awkwardly say goodbye. But this time we hugged each other and he whispered, “I love you,” with a voice barely audible. This would be the first time

these words were ever spoken between us. I returned the phrase with the same awkward, broken delivery.”

This story resonated with many and in an interview Steve Martin describes some correspondence of how it landed for others.

Video: The Death of My Father

The fact is that for most of us family and friends are the most obvious places to affirm our rejoicing in love. Advent is a season where it is so tempting to *ask for flowers* and spell out our expectations of love.

Who knows how many times prior to that his wife or even his son had asked for love – asked for flowers – yet it had not landed.

To suggest is to create love – to describe love may be to destroy love.

The person that wrote to Steve Martin responded to the suggestion of love that creates, not description that suffocates.

Love that suggests generosity creates – love that describes what you owe destroys

Conclusion

On the world stage love is hard to suggest – people rightfully want to describe what the absence of love is doing to their country in war or our world in climate.

No chance of responding and suggesting if we put it in the too hard basket.

As Christians let this be a season of Advent where we seek to learn, take stock of the world of pain that surrounds us .

In a time of Trump, Putin, Erdogan, Orban, Xi and dare we say it Albo and Dutton.

This advent let us rejoice in love that suggests and creates that peace, goodwill and harmony may have chance not only in our lives but in our world