
Letters to A Young Episcopalian: Love

This letter is part of a series of fictional letters by Canon George Maxwell intended for Episcopalians young and old who wonder what it means to be faithful in the world today.

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Dear Anna,

What's love got to do with it?

Your question prompted the juke box in my mind to play Tina Turner's version of a song by that name.

I can still hear Turner endorsing the physical pleasures of "boy meeting girl," while warning against the need for anything more. "What's love," she says, "but a second-hand emotion." "Who needs a heart," she asks, "when a heart can be broken."

Turner's voice is big and bold; her live performances are full of energy.

Yet, pay attention to the end of the third verse. Just as the song really gets rolling, you can hear a slight pause.

"I've been thinking about my own protection," Turner confesses. "It scares me to feel this way."

It's as if Turner suddenly becomes aware of a deep desire for genuine love.

I don't mean the cheap, romantic version of love that she so easily dismisses as a second-hand emotion or the fragile idealized version of love that she understands will break her heart when it can't keep the egocentric promises that it makes.

I mean the strong, spirit-transforming force that we associate with God. This love calls us out of ourselves and into relationship with others. And, it works to free us for those relationships by forgiving our selfishness, restoring our broken trust, releasing our fears, and igniting our compassion.

It's scary, though, because accepting genuine love can be so hard to do. It's like trading in the life that we know for a new one that a powerful part of us doesn't even want. I mean who really wants to welcome those ugly parts of ourselves that we have worked so hard to deny or to acknowledge that our lives depend on gifts of grace that we don't even begin to deserve.

So, you ask, what's love got to do with it?

Everything, actually.

Love, genuine love, is the key to it all.

There is another song on my jukebox. This one is a Taizé chant.

Ubi caritas et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est

Live in charity and steadfast love;

Live in charity, God will dwell with you.

It might be fun to sing both of these songs to yourself (you can find good recordings of each on YouTube) and then ponder your question again.

I think that you might discover something about love that I can't begin to describe.

Happy listening!

Your affectionate uncle,

Ames

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