

I'm writing this on Valentine's Day. For those of us who are blessed to have a loving relationship with a boy friend or girl friend, a fiancée, or a husband or wife, it can be a day to celebrate our love for this person. Most of us don't do enough on days not marked February 14th to express our love to the person in our life who means so much to us, and is often taken for granted.

But like many holidays, Valentine's Day can be bittersweet. For those who don't have a boy friend or girl friend and wish they did, for those who've experienced a recent separation or divorce or broken engagement, for married couples where there's little or no affection left, and for husbands and wives who've had to bury the partner they loved and cherished, Valentine's Day can be anything but rosy and cheerful. Let's not forget these people who are hurting.

I'm so glad God designed life to include romantic love! What a God! No surprise, for the Bible says "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Of course, God's love is infinitely more expansive than just the romantic love we're talking about. The New Testament was written in Greek, and the Greek language had four different words for "love". Most of the time when Scripture speaks of the love of God it uses the Greek word "agape" (a-gop-ay). This is a kind of love that is unselfish. It has the interest of the other person at heart. It is more than a warm feeling, it is doing – acting with genuine concern for another person, even if that person does not deserve it. It can go so far as "loving your enemies", as Jesus said, actively working for the good of people whom we may not like at all!

But God also threw into the mix of His creation this beautiful thing we call romantic love! He even inspired a love poem to be part of the Bible – the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament. Really – it's an erotic love poem! (Oh, I know, some uptight church leaders centuries ago denied that it was a celebration of human, romantic, sexual love. They said it was an allegory depicting Christ's love for the church, His Bride. Ok, I believe it is that, but it is also simply a delightful poem celebrating romantic love)!

I would tell youth in our confirmation classes about this book of the Bible, then warn them not to read it, because it talked about love and sex. I knew, of course, that the first thing they would do when they got home was to dig out a Bible and hunt for the Song of Solomon! Anyway...I just wanted them to know that the God who created and redeemed them was not as prudish as some church people, and He created this wonderful thing we call romantic love!

So, Happy Valentine's Day! And if you are hurting today, remember that when human love fails us, there is a deep and abiding love that can embrace you and sustain you and heal you. It is the love of God, expressed most fully and profoundly in the love of Christ for each of us.

Pastor Harry

