



From the Desk of Pastor Meyer

"True Love"

February 14 is Valentine's Day. Most of us know it as a day to show love through cards, candy, and karats given as gifts to the one whom we love. We usually associate Valentine's Day with Cupid and arrow-packing cherubs, chocolates and Hallmark cards. But did you know that Valentine's Day actually was named for St. Valentine and contains a deeply Christian heritage and history?

According to John Delaney's Dictionary of Saints, there are several possible men who could be the namesake of the day. Most probably, Valentine was a priest in Rome around the time of Emperor Claudius II (late AD 200s). At that time, soldiers were considered unlovable. They were, at best, tolerated; at worst, considered to be monsters. Because of their vocation, they were not to be ministered to by the Church. Even though soldiers were ordered to not marry, legend says that Valentine would marry soldiers to the women they loved. Claudius II was a notorious persecutor of Christians and anyone who helped Christians was committing a crime. Valentine continued to serve publicly as a priest to anyone and everyone who needed his care. When the eccleastical hierarchy found out that he was breaking both civil and church law, Valentine was arrested and imprisonment. While he was in prison, he ministered to his jailer and the jailer's ill daughter. Tradition says that Valentine wrote a note, shaped as a heart, to the sick girl. The note, delivered shortly before he was martyred on February 14, was signed simply, "Your Valentine."

For centuries, this simple symbol of affection lay buried in the annals of history. Geoffrey Chaucer, an English poet and author in the 1700s, discovered and resurrected the idea of giving a heart-shaped note to a loved one. With the Victorian and Romantic periods fully in swing, Chaucer's idea caught on quickly. With that, the modern Valentine was born, cementing its way into our February calendars and creating a \$17 billion-dollar industry surrounding Valentine's Day.

Whatever you give your loved one – whether it's a hand-made card or an exquisite piece of Charming Charlie's finest; whether a gas-station rose or Jarrod's newest design – you carry on the tradition begun almost 2000 years ago by a little-known priest who dared to show compassion to those who were considered by others to be unlovable.

I find it interesting that Valentine's Day falls on Ash Wednesday this year. Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent, the six weeks prior to Easter. During the season of Lent, the church marches to a more somber tune as we reflect on Jesus' suffering and death for us. With contemplation, prayer, meditation on Scripture, and personal reflection we focus particularly on the cross of Christ and what that means for us.

*If my sins give me alarm and my conscience grieve me,
Let Your cross my fear disarm; peace of conscience give me.
Help me see forgiveness won by Your holy passion.
If for me He slays His Son, God must have compassion! (LSB 440)*

Here is the greatest symbol of love that the world has ever seen: the cross of Jesus. It was the heart of Jesus, filled with compassion for sinners, that caused Jesus to take our place. It was the heart of Jesus, moved with sorrow at what the world had become, that caused Jesus to be willing to rescue the world from itself with His death. It was the heart of Jesus, overflowing with love, that allowed Jesus to give Himself for the unlovable – including you and me.

The cross is proof positive of Jesus' will and words: Yes, I love you.

If the devil ever tempts you to think that, for some reason, God doesn't love you, look to the cross: Jesus loves you. If your conscience ever tries to guilt you back into what has already been forgiven, look to the cross: Jesus loves you. If you ever wonder if your baptism really made you a child of God, washing away your sins, look to the cross: Jesus loves you.

On Valentine's Day, you will see and hear about all of the great signs and symbols of love. You may receive some; you may give others. Well and good – all of them – for they are symbols of someone's love for you and your love for them.

But if you want to see true love, look to the cross. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

God fill your love for others with His love of you,

Pastor Meyer