



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 200AD during the reign of Emperor Claudius II. At that time, soldiers were considered unlovable. They were, at best, tolerated; at worst, considered to be practically monsters. Because of their bloody and violent vocation, soldiers were not to be ministered to by the Church. Even though soldiers were ordered to not marry, legend says that Valentine would quietly and secretly marry soldiers to the women they loved. Emperor Claudius was a notorious persecutor of Christians and anyone who helped Christians was committing a crime. Disregarding the empirical mandate, 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 imprisoned where 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 restored 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. 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 today. 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.

This year, Valentine's Day shares the day with Ash Wednesday. 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)*

Our midweek Lenten theme this year is “Our Suffering Savior,” using portions from Isaiah chapters 52 and 53, clearly foretelling Jesus as the one who suffers the cross for our sakes. 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.

The cross is proof positive of Jesus’ will and words: Yes, I love you. If the devil ever tempts you to think otherwise, 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).

Join us for these special midweek services. We serve a light meal starting at 6pm and the service begins at 7pm on February 14, 21, 28, March 6, 13, 20. Lent draws to its climactic end during Holy Week on Palm Sunday, March 24, Maundy Thursday, March 28, and Good Friday, March 29. The great resurrection celebration will be on Easter Sunday, March 31, at both 7am and 10am.

We are continuing to provide post-card sized invitations for you to use to share with friends, neighbors, and family. Take one with you. Invite a friend to hear of Jesus’ great love for them. And, when you see someone in the pew whom you don’t recognize, introduce yourself. Offer to sit with them and, if they seem lost during the service, offer a little bit of help.

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

Pastor Meyer