

## Can Love Save the World?

A Sermon by Rev. Betty Kornitzer

April 25, 2004

This morning I hope to share with you something of who I am, and what I believe. And so, naturally, the topic is Love. We begin with a

Reading, Robert Frost from *Mending Walls*:

*Something there is that does not love a wall,  
That sends the frozen ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast...*

*Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in and walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense.  
Something there is that does not love a wall,  
That wants it down.*

And this from the writing of the psychologist Viktor Frankl:

“Those of us who lived through the concentration camps can remember very clearly the men and women who walked through the huts, comforting those in need, and giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they were a testimony to the possibilities of the human spirit.”

I share with you story about my youngest son, and his education in the possibilities of the human spirit:

When Benjamin, was eight he had to write a report on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whom his class had been studying. The title of Ben's paper was "The Way of the Peaceful Warrior."

Well, I was so impressed, what budding genius I was raising, at the tender age of eight, his title had so eloquently captured the essential spirit of Dr. King's life, can you imagine? It was, however, months later that I discovered that Ben had, shall we say, *borrowed* the title from a book

by Dan Millman that he had seen in our family study. And while there *were* certain ethical issues to be addressed, *still*, to this mother's eyes Ben had made an amazing connection. He had grasped King's vision of the Peaceable Kingdom.

This morning I am here to explore the question:

"Can Love Save the World?" How might Dr. King, "The Peaceful Warrior," respond to that question?

Dr King was both a realist and a dreamer. I imagine that he would insist that we acknowledge the gravity of a broken humanity and a defiled planet. And then, he would direct us toward change.

King was a peaceful warrior, because, to his bones, he believed in the power of peace and love to create change, and yes, perhaps even to "save the world."

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Something is wrong in this world, and we know it. it shakes us to our toes. A global epidemic of fear and hatred is spreading, debilitating humanity. We live in a world afflicted by conflict, and a strong belief in the importance of our *differences*. Imagine that, focus on differences. Rather than commonalities. That is what my mother calls putting the accent on the wrong syllable.

The problem is not this country or that country, not one party or another, not this congressional hearing or that proposed constitutional amendment.

No, the problem is systemic.

For the world's malaise, The only remedy is spiritual. The *only* medicine is Love.

And what kind of love is this, that can cool the fever of hate and fear?

To save this world, we are being asked to love in a *radical* way, to enter the interior battleground of the heart and there to grapple with our personal demons.

Radical love asks us each to become more fully human, for it requires that we acknowledge the walls that we have built against our fellows, stone upon stone of fear and anger, of judgment and hatred, of righteousness and reproach. Radical love demands that we deconstruct these walls, stone by stone.

*Something there is that does not love a wall, that wants it down.*

Let us begin together by examining the stones of self-righteousness and superiority. Almost unnoticed, these can become dangerous stumbling blocks, especially in our social action work.

The Existentialist author Albert Camus warned that in the struggle against injustice, the activist may 'pay a huge ransom, as the wells of love run dry,'

As seekers of social justice, May we help one another to guard against taking strident positions that dehumanize our opponents in our minds and our hearts.

To ensure that *our* "wells of love do not run dry," we must continually replenish them with the sweet waters of compassion--even when...*especially* when compassion is most difficult to find.

Buddhist psychologist, Jack Kornfield tells of a spiritual group that met after the brutal police attacks on Rodney King and the uprising that followed in L.A. He asked participants “What do you do in response to that kind of suffering?” One person said, I work with the homeless, another taught in San Quentin. Then one man raised his hand and said: “I talk to the police. I go up to them and say: “how ya’ doing today? How’s it going with you? What do you think about what happened in L.A.?” The group fell silent, and one by one they began to applaud. My friends-

*Something there is that does not love a wall, that wants it down.*

In his book, The Powers That Be,” theologian Walter Wink challenges us to become “athletes of the spirit.” *Imagine that, Athletes of the spirit.* Picture the Olympic swimmer poised on the starting block, focused, intent, every muscle straining towards excellence. Can we afford to be any less intentional about Radical Love, Our last, best hope?

Radical love is the essential energy of existence, it says no to hatred and yes to life. What might radical love look like in the flesh? I offer this image:

The Location is Sarajevo

The year, 1992. The scene is one of utter devastation and genocide. This once proud city that had been gracious host to the Olympic Games lies in shattered rubble on the ground. They call it “the capital of hell,” where amidst the ruins and the bombardments, the death and the dust, snipers pick off women and children on their way to market. There, Vedan Sma-il-o-vic, renowned concert cellist stands, a target, in full view, and ankle deep in rubble **daily** offers his precious gift of beautiful music to his fellow survivors.

Friends, that is what the face of Radical Love looks like, it is etched with fierce determination and courage, and it is softened by its deep humanity.

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The work of love requires that we confront ourselves with a deeper understanding of our own sense of humanity, that we raise the bar on our expectations of ourselves as human beings.

Albert Einstein had this to say about the possibilities of the human spirit:

“A human being is a part of the whole called by us the universe. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for the few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”

This week we celebrate Earth Day may we be mindful of our planet, and consciously apply more Love to world in which we live and move and have our being.

The work of love requires that we cease and desist from being willing to win by making others wrong. It requires that we recognize that we are all cells in the one body of the universe. The Hindus call this “Unity in Diversity,” where one truly sees self in all beings, and all beings in self. Personally I call it love.

Distressed by the state of world affairs, American poet and philosopher, Wendell Berry Speaks of love when he asks this question:

“How many deaths of other people’s children by bombing or starvation are we willing to accept in order that we may be free, affluent and supposedly at peace?

His answer? A resounding “**NONE!**” “Please, he pleads, “no children, don’t kill any children for my benefit.”

Berry truly experiences our human connectedness. He KNOWS: all violent deaths in distant lands of peoples with brown or red or yellow or black skin, all violent deaths build huge towering walls against the bonds of our humanity.

If the world is to be saved, we must undertake the work of deconstructing the walls.

I want to share a personal story with you:

Early in the afternoon of September 11, 2001. very much in a state of shock, I was driving to be with my daughter and granddaughter. Like many of you, I longed to be close to the warmth of family. Tears streamed down my face as I drove. Then, stopped at a traffic light on Route 9, I looked over at the car to my rights, its window was opened. At that moment, I did the only thing that I could do I rolled down my window, and yelled to the unsuspecting driver: “Hey kid, I LOVE YOU!”

The black teen-ager in the car looked over at this white grandmother, and with a quizzical smile yelled back: “Yeah, lady, I love you too.” Stunned into love by the raw tragedy of that day, there were no walls between us at that moment.

*Something there is that does not love a wall, that wants it down.*

Love is the very heartbeat of our life and work together asa people of faith.

The hallmark of our Universalists heritage was an impassioned commitment to Universal love. In 1863, the Universalist, Olympia Brown, was the first woman in America to be ordained into the ministry in *any* denomination. Her faith is expressed in these words from one of her sermons:

*Universalists believe in a God of Love.*

*They believe in a God who*

*Looks with equal eyes*

*Upon all humans.*

*It is this doctrine of Universal Love that is the life of our denomination. Every human is worthy of love, we dare not reject anyone.*

*Love is the power by which evil shall be driven out, Pride and hate overcome;  
And all souls be reconciled.*

Today, my friends, the spirit of Universal Love – Radical Love, remains the very heartbeat of our liberal faith. It's spirit infuses all seven of our Unitarian Universalist principles which affirm the sacredness of ALL life. There are NO exceptions!

In Universalism we have a radical and courageous heritage.

Today, here in this moment, we are called to live into that heritage with the *full* weight of our hearts, and our spirits *and* our actions.

I ask you to consider that we are, in truth, only one people on this planet, and that the only *true* category is that of humanity. We are called to deconstruct the walls of Fear, and hatred that separate us one from another.

For truly, truly love *is* the Spirit of our faith.

Can Love save the World?

My friends, can anything else?

*Something there is that does not love a wall, that wants it down.*

Stone By Stone By Stone, May it Be So.

Blessed be and Amen