

**It's Not Too Late for Love**  
**8:00 and 11:00 p.m., Christmas Eve, Friday, December 24, 2021**  
**The Rev. Mike Kinman**

*The minute I heard my first love story,  
 I started looking for you,  
 not knowing how blind that was.  
 Lovers don't finally meet somewhere, they're in each other all along.*

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There is a poetry to our longing.

There is a poetry to the deepest desires of our hearts.

We spend our days pretending our lives are prose ... linear narrative that requires no suspension of disbelief.

Tales that fit neatly into expected categories.

That allow us and others the security of definition.

They are the stories we tell each other.

The stories we tell ourselves.

The image we curate online.

We even ask questions as we first meet as acts of courtesy to provide the outline:

Where are you from?

What do you do?

We rarely ask each other the questions that really matter.

Questions that invite the verse beneath the carefully crafted prose.

What do you love?

What do you long for?

What fear wraps its cold fingers around your heart?

What dream sets your soul ablaze?

Seduced by a lifetime of judgment of our creative hearts we become convinced that poets, artists, dancers, lyricists ... these are other people.

We spend our days pretending our lives are prose.

And yet... at night.

The night makes poets of us all.

The night is recess for all that lies beneath. The hopes and fears of all the years come out, meet and play not in a deep and dreamless sleep but in those eternities between dusk and dawn when sleep eludes us.

The choruses of hope and fear, longing and desire echo off the walls of empty houses and vacant beds. Or perhaps whisper in the breathing of the person lying next to us that that despite the security we know we should feel, we still feel unknown and even more alone.

The night makes poets of us all. And especially this night. I wonder if that as much as anything is why we gather this holy night. Why we choose to brave rainy streets and Omicron fears to come to this place ... or gather wherever we are in front of a screen like generations past huddled next to radios waiting for a word of news or perhaps even a morsel of hope.

We gather this night because two years of pandemic, of loss and isolation, of trying to keep up the façade of normalcy, of functionality, has our hearts crying out that we must be more than where we are from and what we do. Crying out for hope not just for COVID's end but for a new beginning where perhaps we can pretend just a little less and sing just a little more. We are poets. Every one of us.

For there is a poetry to our longing.

There is a poetry to the deepest desires of our hearts.

And it is those longings, those deep desires that are the essence of our humanity, the very humanity that God takes on this night.

In daylight hours, the fear we share of having those desires and longings exposed binds us together in conspiracies of silence that only serve to convince each of us we are the only ones who ache with such longing and have such profound depth to our desire. Convince us that everyone else is satisfied, everyone else has it all together and only we are the outliers.

And yet I am convinced it is a universal truth.

You, me ... every one of us have these longings and desires.

And while they may take different forms, the substance is still the same and simple.

We long to be known and loved.

Known and loved so completely, so securely that the ravages of judgment from others and ourselves cannot get a foothold in our minds.

We long to be known and loved, celebrated and embraced so utterly that fear becomes a footnote and sleepless nights a memory.

And so, we come together this night here, there and wherever we are hoping beyond hope that after another year that has pummeled us with loss and left us facing uncertain futures in increasing states of exhaustion ... we come together this holy night to hear an ancient tale first spun in a time of profound loss and uncertainty that surpassed even our own.

We come together to tell the Christmas story and sing the songs even through our masks and hear the ancient promise sung once more.

That this is the night God joins heaven to earth.

That this is the night the divine lover bends down and gently kisses humanity and through the birth of a child whispers in our ear:

There is still time.

It's not too late.

It's not too late for love.

For you.

We long to be known and loved utterly and completely. Perhaps we have felt it once, even for a moment, and wonder if it will ever return. Perhaps we have never felt it and wonder if it has forever passed us by.

Both our longing for love and our fear it is too late for us cut so deeply, even naming them feels perilous ... for they threaten the narrative that we have it all together. And sometimes the façade that we have it all together feels like all that is holding us together.

As we tell the story this night, we place it in time. "In those days when Augustus was Emperor and Quirinius was governor," the Gospel says. Those names were meant to evoke fear. For it was a fearful time for Mary, for Joseph, for shepherd, innkeeper and even for visiting shamans from the East.

Ancient promises of God ... of God's eternal faithfulness and protection seemed more memory than reality. The names Augustus and Quirinius seemed with each passing year to have more power than the God whose promise of love and faithfulness was supposed to sustain us.

So it was then, and so it remains today.

The names change – self-interested rulers and metastasizing corporations, proliferating viral variants and rising global temperatures are the fears that rule our days and populate our dreams.

And with each passing year, the wonder Christmas evoked in us as a child fades just a little more.

With each passing year, the more we begin to wonder if the promise is the dream and our fears the reality.

The seeds of the fear have been sown since our earliest days.

Maybe it was the second-grade teacher who told us that “this was going on our permanent record”

... or the relationship that began with such promise before ending in pain

... or the student loans that tied us to a job that was less than our heart's desire until we just became too ingrained in it to choose another path.

... or maybe it was merely the relentless passage of time that convinced us that love was always conditional, that being fully known and fully loved was too much to hope for, that convinced us to settle for less than our longings crave.

And yet something brings us back ... whether habit, obligation or hope against hope. Something brings us back together this night to hear the child's cry and God whisper her lover's promise once more.

*The minute I heard my first love story,  
I started looking for you, not knowing how blind that was.  
Lovers don't finally meet somewhere, they're in each other all along.*

The Muslim poet and mystic Rumi wrote those words nearly 800 years ago. As a child, Rumi had visions of angels that planted in his heart the poet's dream of a world and a love beyond the refugee's life he and his family shared as they fled the wrath of the Augustuses of his time and place. And yet it wasn't until he met his spiritual guide and most intimate companion, Shams Tabrizi, Rumi in his late 30s, Shams nearing 60, that he found, in the words of Harlem

Renaissance writer Nora Zeale Huston, the love that “made his soul crawl out from its hiding place.”

In Shams, Rumi found the love whose existence the angels had hinted was possible. And it was only when Shams disappeared from his life that he began to write the thousands of love poems for which he is most remembered.

And perhaps the deepest gift of that relationship to Rumi is reflected in those verses.

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When the baby cried out from his exhausted mother's arms in Bethlehem more than two thousand years ago, as those cries echo in this space, in your home and in our hearts this night, they are a reminder that the poetry of our longing is more true than the prose of our narrative facades.

There is still time.

It's not too late.

It's not too late for love.

For you.

Because Rumi was right. Lovers don't finally meet somewhere, they're in each other all along. “Our task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within ourselves that we have built against it.” That is the very nature of Christ. The love that longs to remove all the barriers that we have built against it.

The deep truth of this night is that the Love that has been since the beginning, the Love who loves us so much they couldn't help but become one of us, the Love that is battering against the walls of pain that protect and imprison our hearts, that Love is right now whispering in each of our ears ...

You don't need to long for me.

You don't need to search for me.

I am right here.

I've been in you all along.

That is the deep truth of this night. That the poetry of our deepest longings is joined with the eternal song of God's delight in us and desire for us. And we come together this night wherever we are because it is together, as Maya Angelou sings, that we can "have enough courage to trust love one more time and always one more time."

God sings out this night with the chorus of the angels: "There is still time ... it's not too late because you already are completely known and fully loved. There has not been a second of your life when I have not been with you, inside you, longing for you, loving you, dancing, weeping, wondering and hoping with you."

God is Winnie the Pooh to your Christopher Robin, holding your hand, looking up into your eyes and saying "if you live to be a hundred, I want to live to be a hundred minus one day so I never have to live without you."

God is Steve Martin's Cyrano calling up to you from the chaos below "I am in orbit around you, I am suspended weightless over you like the blue man in the Chagall, hanging over you in a delirious kiss."

God stands at your doorstep without hope or agenda and because it's Christmas – (and at Christmas you tell the truth) - says wordlessly, "To me, you are perfect."

There is a poetry to our longing.

A poetry to the deepest desires of our hearts.

This night, let us dare to trust that we are poets. That our hearts sing deep truth. That there is still time. That it's not too late.

This night let us together "have enough courage to trust love one more time and always one more time."

This night let us together remember that Love has always been for us ... for "Lovers don't finally meet somewhere, they're in each other all along."

Amen.