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Last Epiphany C: Exodus 34:29-35; 2Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-43a
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St. John's Episcopal Church, Wichita, KS

One of the most life-changing books that I have ever read is called 'Interracial Intimacies,' by Randall Kennedy, a professor at Harvard Law School. In it, he traces the history of race relations in this country by following the trajectories of two powerful forces: law, and love.

Using actual court cases and decisions, which surprisingly read like suspense novels, Kennedy shows again and again how fear of differences and unwillingness to lose certain privileges drove the white population to pass law after law against non-white citizens having any number of rights: to liberty, to property, to education, to families of their own choice. This part is sadly familiar to us – from slavery to Jim Crow to the Civil Rights movement, our legacy of racial discrimination.

But the surprising and powerful discovery and point of Kennedy's book is that it was NOT laws or popular movements that first changed the country's opinions on this, but instead, over and over again, it was one person's love of another, regardless of their skin color, that chipped away at these laws and led to their overturn and our country's eventual transformation.

It was white landholders insisting upon leaving property in their wills to their black slaves, despite the law. It was black parents insisting on educating their children, despite the law. It was people of different skin colors and backgrounds insisting that they WOULD marry and have children and adopt children and make families with whomever their hearts chose, despite the law, concluding with the poignantly-named Loving versus Virginia Supreme Court case that made it legal for white and non-white citizens to marry, in 1967.

This is shamefully late in our country's history, but again the book makes the point that it took ONE couple – Richard Loving and his wife, Mildred, who died only one year ago, who were of different races but who dared to marry anyway, to have the courage to endure a prison sentence and eleven years of legal woes before their union was declared non-criminal. Singular choices made by regular people out of simple, powerful love led to a sea-change of public, and eventually legal, opinion in our country.

A pretty powerful image to consider on Valentine's Day.

And of course, this holiday of romance has nothing really to do with Christianity, no matter what you have heard about St. Valentine, who, if he existed at all, was a martyr who died in a decidedly unromantic way and is only accidentally associated with our holiday of love.

But it does remind me that our faith has everything to DO with love - how we receive love, how we give love, and what that love gives us courage to do.

And so often, I think, we treat this topic as if it is not that important, in the grand scheme of things. We tend to think of our hearts as if they are somehow trivial – our feelings and romantic longings are sometimes seen as almost embarrassingly silly, especially when compared to the serious topics with business and science and politics and war. And even religion.

But I would argue that, as Randall Kennedy discovered in his book, LOVE is the bottom line of EVERYTHING that makes the world go round.

How can we move forward with technology or healthcare or education without at least falling in love with possibility, if not with our fellow humans? How can we kill others or deprive others of necessities unless our hearts are turned or hardened against them?

What is it, other than love, that sends us and our resources in droves to places like Haiti, to rescue those in need or danger, or to our own streets, to feed and shelter those who cannot care for themselves?

What we love, who we love, and how we love are the most important topics of our lives.

And we see this in today's Gospel.

And at first, I admit, this story is kind of strange– Peter and John and James on the mountaintop, Jesus suddenly appearing in dazzling white, with Moses and Elijah, and then they all come back down and seemingly go on with life as if nothing extraordinary had happened.

And yes, this is a pre-figuring of who Jesus really is and how he will save the world; and it is also a symbol of Jesus' place in the story of our whole relationship with God – standing with Moses and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets, he is seen in line with the Old Testament story of salvation.

But it is something else as well, something I did not notice until I read it in the context of this week, this day, our cultural celebration of the holiday of love.

Just like Moses in Exodus and in second Corinthians, Jesus is shining with the glory of God. And it reminded me how when someone is in love, we often say that they glow. And then I saw that this is not just something that is LIKE glowing with love, it is, in fact, literally, glowing with love.

The glory of God covers Moses and he is actually covered with the light of God's love that has come so near to him. And Peter and James and John are seeing Jesus enflamed with that same love. They are seeing Jesus not just as someone who loves, but as someone who IS love, the kind of love that is so powerful we sometimes have to look

away; that is so powerful that it brings them right back down the mountain to healing and teaching and raising from the dead.

At the Transfiguration, Peter and James and John get the rare opportunity to see Jesus exactly as he is – dazzling and powerful. It is a moment that is not unlike the moment when we fall in love with someone else, when we suddenly see them, as we sometimes say, in a new light – it doesn't matter what they really look like or what they have ever done, we just see them as perfect and beautiful.

I have heard it said that this is how God always sees us.

And this is also how we are invited to see God. How we are called to see that love is not something that is lighter than the other issues in our lives and in our world, it is heavier. It is more important, and more powerful. That this love has saved us and is saving us, and that when we believe in it, it transforms us and everything around us.

I invite you to try and see this today, this week, God's valentine to you – love your neighbor, of course, even love your enemy, but see if you can also love your heartache and your lostness, your ailments and your troubles.

Love war and poverty and disaster, not in the sense that we would ever want these things to continue, but in the golden balm which is God's glory that heals every wound. Love your most vexing problem, your least favorite chore.

Let the transfiguring power of the love of Christ let you see them as they really are - salvation, reconciliation, resurrection, God bringing us ever nearer to new life, every day.

And when the world breaks your heart, and if we are paying attention, the world breaks our heart every day, let us remember, especially as we are turning the corner to the season of Lent, that Jesus let his heart be broken, literally, for our lives, because of his love, and puts it all back together through his resurrection.

It is the most romantic story of all, the one that never lets us go, the one that empowers us to change the world.

Let this be our first love. Let this be the one that never gets away.