

Love Speak

By Reverend Lawrence M. Henson

Most people are from and live in geographic areas or geologic areas that also carry an overburden of culture. I was born in an area of Oklahoma known as a transitional area between the Great Plains of a few miles west and the Ozark mountains. I lived in an area that got three times the rainfall of western Oklahoma and about twice the storms so there were several names for rain, storms, and lightening. Here on the eastern portion of the Colorado uplift we have several names for rocks, canyons, and sky. They say Eskimos have hundreds of words for snow.

Our Christo/Hellenistic heritage gives us four distinct words for love and there are variations to those four. I've always thought it odd that English would need to borrow from the Greek and did not have similar words for such a significant sentiment. Of course, English is an analytic language borrowing meanings and retaining meanings rather than morphing meanings into original words. That is the nature of our English language. Of these four words we think of love as primarily Agápe and Philia, unconditional love and brotherly love. Of course I'm over simplifying here, but I think you get the idea. The other two forms of love are Eros or passionate love associated with longing for union and intimacy and Storge or affection mostly used in ancient times to describe a familial relationship such as a parent for a child. But it can mean much more.

One of the most wonderful aspects of our community, our congregation, is the love of art, music and beauty. It's easy to think of that love as mere affection, but I think it is much more. Look around and I think you will find artists all around you. An artist answers a call similar to a religious experience. There is something almost irresistible to that call. You've seen it and not known exactly what you were seeing. You or your friend create something beautiful, but you don't see it that way. You can see something in your mind that you may struggle to get out of your head and into some medium. Creation never comes from thin air. It is a response to a vision that may or may not be totally conscious. The artist is responding an inner vision that almost no outer expression can match.

It is in this sense that I see an overlap between Agápe and Philia. Our roots are in Christianity and many of us may still be Christian. Agápe is the primary form of love appropriated by modern Christianity to express one's love for God. How do we retain that experience when our concept of God is less clear? We shift our love over to the familiar which becomes divine. In that sense, art is a form of divinity. Buddhists understand this when they speak of ordinary magic. The artist understands this when he or she sees the beauty of this world. The artist understands that we are all part of that web of life and we are all connected and woven together; both Agápe and Philia. When I say all, I also mean not only our brothers and sisters, but all of nature.

Though it's winter and the weather can be either crystal clear or absolutely horrible, February is a prime month to fall in love with the world around us. Beauty surrounds us everywhere we go. Whether the love we experience is focused on the features only snow can bring to the mountains and the canyons or extended to our brothers and sisters as we all flow through life together, we are all bound together in the web of life. The mountains are our brothers and the rivers our sisters so unleash the artist in your heart and let your affection flow.