

The message given by Rev. Dr. Tom Zoelzer on All Saints Sunday, November 7, 2010 based on Luke 10:38-42 and Ephesians 1:15-19.

## Falling in Love Again

Falling in Love Again  
Never wanted to  
What am I to do?  
Can't Help it!

Ever since the Senior Pastor Search Committee asked the Governing Board to call a special congregational meeting, this song we just sang has been going through my head. It is the signature song of Marlene Dietrich first sung in a movie she made 80 years ago called *The Blue Angel (1930)*. Since then, others have sung it professionally including Christina Aguilera in a version that has much more beat than the version we just sang.

I thought about this song in connection to the special bond between a pastor and a congregation. A pastor comes into a congregation as a stranger, but over time that person develops very deep pastoral relationships with members of the congregation. Pastors teach, preach, inspire, lead and serve, and along the way a special bond of trust, appreciation, and love develops. A pastor baptizes or confirms a child, and the parents look forward to the day that pastor might officiate at their child's wedding. A loved one died, and a pastor takes the survivors by the hand and walks through the valley of the shadow of death and helps people find their way to a more blessed place.

Ministry is a wonderful relationship. But sooner or later a pastor is going to leave. Through death, retirement, or taking another call, a pastor is always a temporary fixture in the life of the congregation. A minister is called by a congregation and hopefully by the Holy Spirit to be the spark that helps a congregation grow and thrive as a vital body of Christ. But every pastor for personal reasons or a sense that they have accomplished all they are going to be able to accomplish in that location make the decision that they need to see where the Spirit is calling them now and allow a new spark to come to the congregation. In a way, every pastor is a transitional pastor – only the number of years varies.

Everybody knows this, but when it happens – people are heartbroken. Love means giving a part of yourself to someone else, and when that person is no longer there, a part of you goes with them.

So the solution could be - “I will never give my heart again!” - at least to a pastor. People think, “I will stay stoic. I will be cool. I will not give my heart again.” And then the next pastor comes along and all of a sudden –

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Can't help it because we are hard wired to love, and when someone loves us, love is often the response. To love and to love again is what being a person of faith is all about.

Jesus teaches us this reality. When Jesus was asked of all the 613 commandments, laws, and ordinances of the Jewish faith which was the most important? Jesus choice two – love God with all you heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength and you will love your neighbor. And then at the last supper, Jesus told his followers “to love one another. As I have loved you, you are to love one another.” He also teaches us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

The apostle Paul in Romans 12 puts it this way:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour.

To love and love again is what being a Christian is all about. In the Bible, love is about compassion and understanding. It is an attitude of care.

Jesus calls us to love even when our compassion and understanding is rejected, even when people do things that annoys us or offends us, even when someone hurts us we are to love. Sometimes, we have to do what is necessary to protect ourselves and take necessary action to change the situation, but in all things, we are to do it in love because Christian love is about compassion and understand for others:

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To be a Christian, means we can't help it. This is choosing the better part. Jesus gave this lesson to Martha today in scripture. Jesus came to their house, and Martha did what women were suppose to do – play host and let the men folk talk. Martha's sister, Mary, stayed to listen. So Martha asked Jesus to intervene and straighten her sister out for leaving her with all the work. But Jesus called her to a better place. He said, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

We are always called to choose the better part by taking time to listen to Jesus. Sometimes we are afraid to listen to Jesus and care this much because it is too exhausting. But God keeps priming the pump with love and care for us so that we have compassion and understand to share with others. One of the reasons we come to worship on a regular basis is to prime the pump of care so that we can share it in our everyday life. To love and to love again is what a person of faith does.

We love because Jesus' love for us gives us the courage to do it, believe it, live it. So it is time to love again! I have enjoyed being your transitional pastor, but it is time for a new senior pastor. I have done about everything that I am going to be able to do to help you into your future. It is time for a new person to challenge you and love you with a spark of energy and new possibilities. I am excited about your future!

I know it will take awhile for Pastor Fred to earn your love and respect, but I invite you to love him and let his love and vision lead you in exciting ways. It will be different but there will be spirit here and there will be new life.

I often think about a new pastor like a new doctor. A doctor decides to retire or sell his practice. So a new doctor takes over the practice. The great majority of the people in the practice will check out the new doctor and say "good- I like him or her" and life goes on. There will be some who check out the new doctor and say "No" he does do it for me and look for a new doctor. This is always a reality, but hopefully the new doctor has the ability to reach out to new people and build up a successful practice.

It works the same way in ministry. A new minister comes in and the vast majority says "Good" and life goes on. Some will say "no" he doesn't do it for me and become less active. But hopefully the new pastor will bring new ideas that will attract new people and exciting things will happen. There is so much potential in this church, and my prayer is that a new senior pastor and the Holy Spirit sparks an explosion of faith, hope, and love in this place!

I choose a reading from Ephesians today because it is a letter of thanksgiving to the saints of the church. In my opinion, the Catholic Church has done us a disservice by encouraging us to think of "saints" as only deserving dead people of honor and

example. But this is not what the word "saint" means in the New Testament at all! A "saint" in the New Testament is those in the church, living and dead, set apart for service. Saints accept Jesus as their Savior and guide and work to bring the kingdom of God into their life and into the world. Jesus plans to love us until we know nothing better to do than love one another and never be exhausted by the love and care we give to other!

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Amen.