

# **I'm Ready for Love**

**Sermon preached on the occasion of the  
Christening of  
Kristin Smith Harrison  
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“Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”  
-I Corinthians Chapter 13

“Love has no other desire but to fulfill itself.  
But if you love and must needs have desires,  
Let these be your desires:  
To melt and be like a running brook  
that sings its melody to the night.  
To know the pain of too much tenderness.  
To be wounded by your own understanding of love;  
And to bleed willingly and joyfully.”

-Kahlil Gibran

## **“I'M READY FOR LOVE”**

I used to be a morning person, but not any longer. A household with three teenage girls preparing to leave for school can quickly break through that thin veneer of civilization which overlays our basic animal selves.

First, there are the electric hair dryers. Being awakened by the shrill whine of an electric hair dryer rivals the Chinese water torture in effect. It is a piercing irritating noise pitched at just the right level to rub your nerve endings raw.

And then there are the disputes over clothing. Two weeks ago at our coffee hour I ran into another father of teenage females as he was remarking to a friend, “If I ever hear the word Vaccarro again I think I am going to shoot someone!” (Vaccarro is the trade name of a woman's blouse.) “You too,” I said, with the greatest of sympathy. I can't believe the disputes that have erupted over who is wearing the red Vaccarro or who left it on the floor or didn't wash it or who it belongs to and the conditions for borrowing it.

Added to this of course are the proverbial disputes over how many people can be crowded around one sink to brush teeth and wash faces and the yowls of anguish should

anyone use the water hot or cold while someone else is in the shower. The whole process reaches a crescendo as the hour for school relentlessly approaches and no one has had any breakfast, homework papers and books are misplaced, hats and gloves nowhere to be found, three dogs are yapping at a neighborhood cat, the keys to the car have disappeared and a warning notice from school is suddenly presented which must be signed and returned THAT DAY! And, amid all this confusion we now add the calming background of rock and roll music in stereo and uninterrupted by talk on WCOZ. *[There's a handwritten note here that says "WBCN, on high volume so can be heard with shower"]*

Tuesday mornings are often my worst day. Tuesday is the day we write our church newsletter and so it is the day when I must come up with a sermon title for the following Sunday. At 6:30 a.m. last Tuesday I was trying to gain a few more minutes of peace before the inexorable whine of the hair dryer would announce the beginning of the day. Those early waking moments are often a good time to come up with fresh ideas. What should I talk about February 15<sup>th</sup> the day after Valentines Day? At this point the sound of the stereo entered my consciousness. The rhythmic beat of drums and the twang of guitars, as nerve shattering as that form of music can be to someone over forty, was almost beautiful in contrast with the usual awakening sound of the hairdryer. The, this voice began to bellow forth to the music repeating the line over and over again (as you may realize many of these rock and roll songs have a very limited vocabulary) "Hey baby, I'm ready for love. Hey baby, I'm ready for love."

My initial thought was, "My God you must be kidding!" I'm ready for love at 6:30 a.m, on a weekday morning! It was rather obvious from the passion in the singer's voice what kind of love he had in mind. But when I thought to myself supposing we interpret the word love in this song more broadly not just as eros, but as philos and agape as companionship and compassion and charity. What a beautiful way to start the day and what a great theme for a Valentines sermon. I'm ready for love. Yes, the love of which Paul spoke when he said love is patient and kind, not boastful or rude. O.K. family I'm ready for love. Turn on the hair dryer, make room around the sink, lay off the hot water, share the Vaccarro, help each other with your books and homework, set the table for breakfast and hold the doors for one another as you leave. Yes sir baby, I'm ready for love. I think I'll buy that record and play it at full volume every morning!

Of course I haven't purchased the record as yet, but it makes a nice sermon title and is something to think about. What does it mean to be ready for love? When are we, and when, if ever, are we not ready for love?

It occurs to me that of all the people here today the one most obviously ready for love is little Kristin *[crossed out in pencil, and "Richard" is written in]*. She *[he]* of course can't even say the words as yet, but then she *[he]* really doesn't have to. Mother Nature has built into little babies a most powerful kind of nonverbal communication which says loud and clear I'm ready for love. Yes here I am all tiny and cuddly and helpless and smooth and soft and responsive and cute and fresh and unspoiled.

There is no one in the whole wide world who is any more ready for love than a little baby. And indeed, we know from psychological studies that at no time of life is a person more teachable when it comes to love than in the first few months after birth. Is that not in fact the very thing which we proclaimed and celebrated in the christening service we have shared this morning? Here is this child ready for love. Do you the parents and do you the larger community as represented by this congregation hear the call and are you prepared to respond that you are ready for love as well? But even as we say it we come upon the rather obvious realization that the statement “I’m ready for love” is very different for the baby than it is for us. When a baby says, nonverbally, “I’m ready for love,” it means that I am ready to receive love. And when the parents reply, “I’m ready for love” they had best understand that they mean I’m ready to give love.

The infant is most ready for love because the infant is most helpless. The infant cannot feed itself or clothe itself or protect itself. In a word an infant is extremely vulnerable. But what we can see most clearly in the case of an infant is no less true of an adult with one major difference. The vulnerability which is natural to the infant becomes in an adult a matter of conscious understanding and choice. Growing older in our culture usually involves priding ourselves on becoming more independent, more able to care for ourselves, more productive and secure. Being ready to receive love therefore runs counter to these very marks of growth and maturity. It is to be as a child.

It is in this light that we may begin to understand the full impact of Jesus’ admonition that, “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.” Often this statement is interpreted to mean only that faith requires of us a kind of naïve credulousness characteristic of children. Here, however, we discover that much more is involved. To receive love is to be vulnerable. It is to allow ourselves to be needful and dependent. And moreover it is to do so with a kind of knowledge that a child does not have, the knowledge that we can be hurt, disappointed and rejected. Or, as Gibran expressed it, “... even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you.” To be ready for love is a supreme act of courage for it is to make oneself vulnerable in a world which we know to be filled with crucifixions.

Sadly, as we grow older and the more losses we have experienced, quite often the more reluctant we become to be ready for love. “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.” Or, to paraphrase, in order to be ready to receive love you must open yourself and become as vulnerable as a tiny child. Perhaps we should repeat the words of our christening ceremony for each one of us on an annual basis. “Each of us comes into the world in weakness and dependence. This dependence is for love and wisdom which shall nurture life and growth.”

That statement is really true of us at any age only in our pride and egoism we often fail to recognize and acknowledge it.

But let us also look at the other side of the statement, “I’m ready for love,” that is, from the point of view of the parent who is saying I am ready to give love. The critical point here is that we have low expectations from an infant. In the first few weeks of life

we do not expect an infant even to smile back at us when we smile and we certainly do not expect the infant to verbalize the phrase, “thank you” or to help around the house or not to interrupt us when we are speaking. We recognize in the infant no evil motive, no attempt to exploit us, no intention of wrong. We are fully ready to give love to the infant with no expectation of immediate return and we are ready to forgive the infant almost any impropriety. In other words to be ready to give love is to be prepared to be non-judgmental, forgiving and to expect nothing in return. That love also has precedent in these familiar words of Jesus, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake (or for the sake of love) the same shall save it.” Gibran also gave expression to this truth when he wrote that love is, “to melt and be like a running brook that sings its melody to the night...it is to bleed willingly and joyfully.”

How easily the singer repeated the words. How easily we sometimes repeat the words, I’m ready for love. But taken seriously being ready both to give and receive love requires a tremendous act of courage. It requires a tremendous act of courage. It requires that we be ready to receive love as a small child in all its innocence and vulnerability and to give love as a parent with complete unselfishness and forgiveness. No, it is not easy to say I’m ready for love, hair dryers, arguments over Vaccaros and all. And yet, our tradition and the best wisdom of the ages informs us that only by so saying and so living shall we ever enter the Kingdom of God and abide in peace.

*[Handwritten – Let us pray.]*