

**Sunday, July 11, 2021 Love in the Time of COVID** Jim Fisher, Worship Leader

Kay Wilkinson, Worship Associate

Suzanne Aubrey, Technical Support

Lori Johnson, ZOOM Host

7/11 Worship Service Zoom Meeting:

[At 10:30am, Lori mutes all participants, begins recording to i-cloud, enables live transcript. Suzanne copies announcement information into the chat. Lori Spotlight Pepper to share announcements.]

[Lori Spotlights Pepper at 10:30am; Lori shares info in chat]

Announcements & Welcome - Kay

[Lori Spotlights Jim]

Welcome

My name is Jim Fisher, I'm delighted to be a member of this church, the ninth UU Church to which I have belonged, give or take. I'm delighted to be with you again this beautiful summer morning in this most temperate of places in the world. The theme today is Love in the Time of COVID. While attending graduate school in Chapel Hill, North Carolina I chanced upon a musical performance by a very popular folk group called Red Clay Ramblers for a Medical Pathology Conference. The band opened by saying that they were delighted to offer the evening's entertainment. They would begin with a love song, because as all pathologists know with love comes disease.

We will begin with a prelude selected and performed by our wonderfully sentimental music director, historian, linguist and genealogist, Dr. Wayne Smith.

[Wayne Piano Solo ]

Prelude: Love is a Many Splendored Thing

[Lori Spotlights Jim]

Call to Worship – Jim

CS Lewis Liking and Loving in Mere Christianity (1952)

“But though natural likings should normally be encouraged, it would be quite wrong to think that the way to become charitable is to sit trying to manufacture affectionate feelings. Some people are 'cold' by temperament; that may be a misfortune for them, but it is no more a sin than having a bad digestion is a sin; and it does not cut them out from the chance, or excuse them from the duty, of learning charity. The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. “

Let us join this morning in a practice of love. Cast aside your frustrations, resentments, exhaustion, impatience and consider the possibilities of a community focused on loving each other and expressing that love in charity.

We will now join the Twin Cities Womens Choir singing our opening Hymn #131 Love Will Guide Us.

[Lori Spotlights Choir or Suzanne Shares Screen]

Opening Hymn: # 131 Love will Guide Us

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKp-D-jOJBE&ab\\_channel=TwinCitiesWomen%27s%26Girls%27Choir](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKp-D-jOJBE&ab_channel=TwinCitiesWomen%27s%26Girls%27Choir)

[Lori Spotlights Kay]

Chalice Lighting - Kay

[Lori Spotlights Kay; Suzanne posts Affirmation shares screen

Affirmation of Covenant by James Vila Blake

[Lori Spotlights Jim for intro Suzanne shares screen - end at 6:00 - Spotlight Jim again.]

Time for All Ages - My Name is Gabito

I recently discovered this small book written by Monican Brown and illustrated Raul Colon titled Me Llamo Gabito, or My Name is Gabito.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjbmlhNfQ6Y&ab\\_channel=Mr.Alicea%27sArcadeofKnowledge](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjbmlhNfQ6Y&ab_channel=Mr.Alicea%27sArcadeofKnowledge)

[Lori Spotlights Kay Suzanne shares PP slide w/ embedded music]

Offering Kay

[Lori spotlights Kay] Suzanne shares music

Joys & Sorrows Kay - Music and Text Chat

[Lori Spotlights Jim]

## Prayer Jim

A Celtic Loric By Maureen Killoran

Spirit of all blessing, be with us  
in the ordinariness of our days.

May hope's light guard us and keep cynicism from our hearts.

May the energy of laughter build endurance for the dark times of our lives.

May creativity's vision grant the possibility of seeing old relationships with new eyes.

May the oil of healing keep us  
from anger's hardness or despair.

May the mantle of humility give courage to admit when we are wrong.

May compassion's loom weave in us  
the discipline to forgive.

May patience help us bear in mind  
that ours is not the only scale of time.

May the flame of justice be a beacon for the choices we must make.

May peace be ever in us  
and sustain our stressful days.

Spirit of all blessing, be with us  
in the ordinariness of our days.

Suzanne will now share a video of the Nashville Unitarian Universalist Church 2011 singing  
Meditative Hymn #1002 [Comfort Me](#)

[Jim Announces and Suzanne Shares Screen]

Meditative Hymn - #1002 Comfort Me

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovXRIn8liPg&ab\\_channel=JasonShelton](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovXRIn8liPg&ab_channel=JasonShelton)

Nashville Unitarian Universalist Church 2011

[Lori Spotlights Kay and / or Jim]

Reading 1 - Frank Church

Reading 2 - Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Forrest Church:

“The greatest of all truths is that love never dies, that every act of love that we perform

in this life is carried on into another life and passed on into another life, so that centuries from now the love carries, and that is the work of religion. The opposite of love is not death. It is fear. Fear is what armours our hearts. If our hearts are armoured, they'll never be broken, and I have seen so many people get hurt in love and then try to protect themselves against it, and when they protect themselves against love, they protect themselves against the only thing that is worth living for."

Frank Forrester Church IV was a leading Unitarian Universalist minister, author, and theologian. He was Senior Minister of the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City, until late 2006 when he was appointed as Minister of Public Theology. [Wikipedia](#)

**Born:** September 23, 1948, [Palo Alto, CA](#) **Died:** September 24, 2009, [New York, NY](#)

**Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014) Page 35 Love in the Time of Cholera. P. 23**

**(Jim)** It began with routine simplicity. Dr. Juvenal Urbino had returned to the bedroom, in the days when he still bathed without help, and began to dress without turning on the light.

**(Kay)** As usual she was in her warm fetal state, her eyes closed, her breathing shallow, that arm from a sacred dance above her head. But she was only half asleep, as usual, and he knew it. After a prolonged sound of starched linen in the darkness, Dr. Urbino said to himself:

**(Jim)** "I've been bathing for almost a week without any soap."

**(Kay)** Then, fully awake, she remembered, and tossed and turned in fury with the world because in fact she had forgotten to replace the soap in the bathroom. She had noticed its absence three days earlier when she was already under the shower, and she had planned to replace it afterward, but then she forgot until the next day, and on the third day the same thing happened again.

**(Jim)** The truth was that a week had not gone by, as he said to make her feel more guilty, but three unpardonable days, and her anger at being found out in a mistake maddened her. As always, she defended herself by attacking.

**(Kay)** "Well I've bathed every day," she shouted, beside herself with rage, "and there's always been soap."

**(Jim)** Although he knew her battle tactics by heart, this time he could not abide them. On some professional pretext or other he went to live in the interns' quarters at Misericordia Hospital, returning home only to change his clothes before making his evening house calls.

**(Kay)** She headed for the kitchen when she heard him come in, pretending that she had something to do, and stayed there until she heard his carriage in the street. For the next three months, each time they tried to resolve the conflict they only inflamed their feelings even more.

**(Jim)** He was not ready to come back as long as she refused to admit there had been no soap in the bathroom,

**(Kay)** and she was not prepared to have him back until he recognized that he had consciously lied to torment her.

[Lori Spotlights Jim]

### **Love in the Time of COVID: With Apologies to Gabriel García Márquez**

By now you have realized that I am going to be drawing on Nobel Award writer Gabriel García Márquez this morning. In 2015 I rejoined the Peace Corps with nine other former volunteers for a 10 month assignment to design and test community and economic development programs for future Peace Corps volunteers. It was a golden opportunity for us to be volunteers again; to jump in feet first with a change of language, climate, diet, and vocation. Being experienced volunteers, we were provided just two weeks of orientation rather than the normal three months and sent forth. I think we all discovered unique opportunities and challenges in our communities, but I was I think the most fortunate to be sent to Aracataca, Magdalena, Colombia, the birthplace of Gabriel García Márquez, affectionately called Gabo, and the location he called Macondo in his most famous novel, 100 Years of Solitude. I will be reflecting on his second most noted book is Love in the Time of Cholera.

In Aracataca I taught in a community college, worked with cocoa and palm oil farmers, marketers and agriculture extensionists, developed a plastic recycling program, created tourism brochures, assisted with a comprehensive planning process, created a website for artisans, played music, danced and marched in parades. I think perhaps my legacy

will be that I played music and danced. The rest has probably melted into the 95 degree dust of time.

Donna joined me for six of the ten months and together we explored a very small circle of places we could reach on bicycles. We bounced along those 95 degree dirt roads meeting a wide array of farmers, politicians, school teachers, artists, police and army officers, children - a real cross section of Colombian society. Aracataca was a literary and musical city with a museum created in the image of Gabo's home. Festivals, poetry readings, musical performances, religious services and parades abounded. The experience was intensely emotional, with bustling activity, little to no privacy, loud, loud music and bountiful, open armed displays of affection.

What a contrast to the last sixteen months of COVID. Rural Maine is rarely loud or bustling, and during the time of COVID the silence has been deafening. Public spaces, particularly in urban areas, were emptied and even our rural gathering places were shuttered. We enjoyed a tremendous advantage over our urban fiends in that we were never confined to home. We have enjoyed ample access to nature and ample distance to call over the fence to our neighbors. Still, we understood so little about COVID and were reasonably concerned that the air, water, food, hard and soft surfaces all be vectors for the disease. Toilet paper and hand sanitizer disappeared from the stores, N95 face masks jumped 1,000% in price, and we became acutely aware of the orange New York license plates arriving in March Of 2020, three months ahead of schedule.

What becomes of love in a pandemic? What new challenges have we met on the road to recovery and how have we met them? I will beg a little of your precious time this morning to explore these changes as we shine the twin lights of science and literature on Love in the Time of COVID.

## **What is Love?**

**Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014) Page 35 Love in the Time of Cholera. P. 43**

Florentino Ariza's godfather, an old homeopathic practitioner who had been Tránsito Ariza's confidant ever since her days as a secret mistress, was also alarmed at first by the patient's condition, because he had the weak pulse, the hoarse breathing, and the pale perspiration of a dying man. But his examination revealed that he had no fever, no pain anywhere, and that his only concrete feeling was an urgent desire to die. All that was needed was shrewd questioning, first of the patient and then of his mother, to conclude once again that the symptoms of love were the same as those of cholera. He prescribed infusions of linden blossoms to calm the nerves and suggested a change of air so he could find consolation in distance, but Florentino Ariza longed for just the

opposite: to enjoy his martyrdom.

I am more familiar with talking about repairing a stuck valve on a motorcycle than talking about love. In Robert Persig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, I take the classical view. Love can be understood by how it functions and is maintained. A romantic view would be quite different, so let's break it down.

I am quite sure that Mark Worth has covered this better than I will. We have one word, "love", that has many interpretations. In Greek there are four words that refer to various aspects or types of love. CS Lewis explains this in some detail in [The Four Loves: Affection, Friendship, Eros and Charity](#). I invite you to consider the last sixteen months of your own life during the COVID pandemic and how each of these four aspects of love were affected or perhaps were helpful in managing the crisis.

Storge [στοργή](#) Affection is an empathy bond between Need-Love/Gift-Love. This is typified by the love between a parent and a child or siblings. Lewis believed that this accounted for 9/10ths of all solid and lasting human happiness. How did the pandemic affect your connections to your parent, siblings and children? Did you feel the gut punch when a family member reported that they had been diagnosed with COVID?

Philia [φιλία](#) – is the love between friends. Recall that "Philiadelphia" is the city of brotherly love. This love can be very strong, but Lewis considers this to be "the least biological" and "the least *natural* of loves".<sup>[12]</sup> One of my favorite concepts to come out of the COVID pandemic is the "pod" or small circle of family and friends with whom we continued daily interaction, often without masks or distancing.

Eros [έρως](#) – Romantic Love. Lewis considers this to be a composite both of a reasoning angel and an instinctual alley-cat.<sup>[15]</sup> Eros is powerful, "the most appreciative of all pleasures;"<sup>[16]</sup> and, at the same time "mercilessly chaining together two mutual tormentors, each raw all over with the poison of hate-in-love".<sup>[19]</sup> This is the love about which I was most curious from an epidemiological perspective. We'll look at the data shortly.

And last, but not least,

Agape [ἀγάπη](#) – Charity, Boundless, Unconditional Spiritual Love. A "love that transforms human hearts and souls, that can bring us into oneness, into harmony with all creation." A great many sermons have been delivered about Agape, but one element speaks clearly to the challenge of being locked down.

“Agape love is not a sentimental feeling, it is a decision we must make. It is a decision we must make towards all people no matter how undeserving they may appear to be.” Here I find a great many thoughtful people have come to an agreement. Agape is not so much a feeling as a practice.

In his bestselling 1978 book [\*The Road Less Traveled\*](#), M. Scott Peck said Agape “love is not a feeling, it is an activity and an investment.” “The will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.” “It is Simple, but not easy.” (The protagonist in Robert Persig’s [\*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance\*](#) is a classical thinker who practices motorcycle maintenance as a daily ritual, a prayer or meditation.)

Any crisis is likely to test our charity. This is particularly the case when our health or the health of our families is imperilled. Not only are the underpinnings of our beliefs and charitable goodwill tested, but the practices we have used to sustain our beliefs are also interrupted. In my case, playing music and singing is my most cherished spiritual activity. I am particularly given to engaging in this practice in the megachurch of large orchestras and wind bands. COVID nearly eliminated this essential practice in my life. I suspect many of you have had your essential rituals interrupted by COVID.

## **Of Cholera and COVID**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez Love in the Time of Cholera (p 74)

“How noble this city must be,” he would say, “for we have spent four hundred years trying to finish it off and we still have not succeeded,”

They almost had, however. The epidemic of *cholera morbus*, whose first victims were struck down in the standing water of the market, had, in eleven weeks, been responsible for the greatest death toll in our history. ...

After the first two weeks of the cholera epidemic, the cemetery was overflowing and there was no room left in the churches despite the fact that they had dispatched the decayed remains of many nameless civic heroes to the communal ossuary.

...The cholera was much more devastating to the black population, which was larger and poorer, but in reality it had no regard for color or background.

It ended as suddenly as it had begun, and the extent of its ravages was never known, not because this was impossible to establish but because one of our most widespread



virtues was a certain reticence concerning personal misfortune.

Dr. Marco Aurelio Urbino, the father of Juvenal, was a civic hero during that dreadful time, as well as its most distinguished victim. By official decree he personally designed and directed public health measures, but on his own initiative he intervened to such an extent in every social question that during the most critical moments of the plague no higher authority seemed to exist.”

## Vectors

Diseases have transmission vectors. The path can be very direct human to human transmission or pass through several stages before reaching humans. We have learned that COVID is transmitted on very small droplets and possibly aerosols (very fine droplets) Breathing, coughing, talking, sneezing, can all move COVID from an infected person to others. Cholera follows fecal-oral transmission, typically in food and water.

Because COVID transmits directly from person to person, prevention requires stopping infect droplets or developing immunity. Options include:

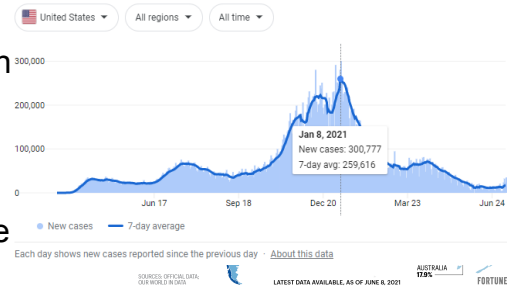
Avoidance - Isolation, distancing, masks, testing, quarantine, lockdown, travel restrictions

Infection / denial – that may provide immunity

Vaccination – that has been demonstrated to provide a high level of immunity

As my father would say in the midst of a very challenging hike, “well, here we are”

The COVID pandemic case count in the US began on March 3, 2020 with 16 new cases. After an initial wave in the spring of 2020, we had a slowdown in the last summer, but epidemiologists warned of a much more consequential wave in the winter.



By January, 2021 the US was experiencing about 300,000 new cases every day. Fortunately several very effective vaccinations were developed and distributed widely in the US, resulting in a dramatic decline in cases to approximately 20,000 per day as recently as last week.

The most recent data indicate that world wide there have been 185 million COVID infections and 4 million deaths. The US is still a world leader in infections (35 million) and COVID deaths (621,837). Maine and Hancock County fared better than many states thanks in part to higher than average vaccination rates and

	World	USA	Maine	Hancock County
Coronavirus Cases	185,000,000	34,643,902	69,201	1,378
Deaths:	4,000,000	621,873	862	38

Unfortunately the combination of ongoing resistance to vaccination and far more infectious COVID variants are once again driving infection rates up in the US and in the world. There is a clear and predictable correlation between low vaccination rates and high infection rates. The coming wave was entirely avoidable.

### Lockdown and Living Close

For the first year of the COVID pandemic we had no vaccine. Best practices for control of an infectious disease were traditional public health measures including closing public places, slowing migration, mandatory quarantine, testing, masking, and a number of methods that turned out to be unnecessary like washing groceries.

### Lock down and Love

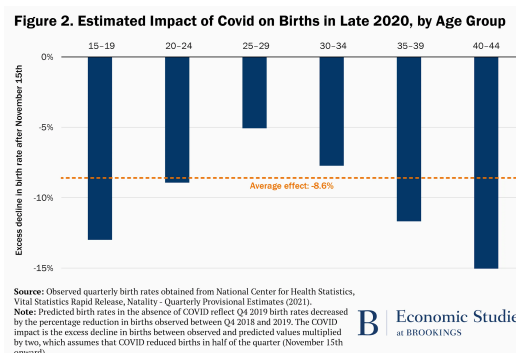
I cannot speak from personal experience. I worked from home one day, found it impractical and resumed commuting to my office. Donna, a part-time food coop employee, continued working as well. In fact, COVID increased our workloads in unexpected ways.

Not having lived through a lock down in any real sense, I have an image of tigers in a cage snarling as they circle one-another in close confinement. They have nowhere to escape the relentless presence of others. They have nothing to eat because lock down has prevented either from earning a living.

Another image emerges of the love birds, happily nesting and enjoying a romantic good time during lock down.

For many the lockdown was very real, but the consequences have been mixed.

Birthrates are a lagging indicator, following an event by about 9 months. Birthrates in the US as in the world have been falling for many years. The data suggest that that decline has



been faster during COVID, particularly for women on the young and older ends of their fecund years.

Divorce rates surged in the initial months of lock down, but then dropped below historic trends (that have been going down for decades). Marriage rates also dropped. The jury is out on the relationship between COVID and divorce.

The decline in divorces has been linked to a variety of intervening variables, including financial dependence, greater family contact, working out problems, and housing shortages. Many divorces may have been postponed rather than canceled. As such, Vaccination may reignite the demand for divorces.

Stress increased during lock down to 31% of adults and 47% of adults with children under 18. (Harris Poll / American Psychological Association Feb, 2021). There have been numerous studies measuring the impact of COVID on weight gain, alcohol and drug use, sleep disorders, anxiety about the future and other mental health issues..

## **Us and Them**

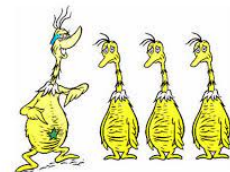
As with previous pandemics, COVID has had dramatic effects on our relationships at a societal level. Factionalism has been particularly pronounced during the Time of COVID. Here are a few examples:

Disease outbreaks spread most rapidly in cities, becoming epicenters (NYC). People flee the epicenter for places that have low disease prevalence (downeast Maine). People in low prevalence areas, even those that have recently arrived, seek to discourage or outright block these COVID refugees from entering their communities

Another, even more disturbing challenge has been the factionalism arising out of vaccination. Much like the sneetches of Dr. Suess's children's book, political parties have become aligned with vaccination. Mask wearing became a flag for your political beliefs rather than public health measure.

## **Resilience**

M. Scott Peck, **The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values, and Spiritual Growth**



“Genuine love is volitional rather than emotional. The person who truly loves does so because of a decision to love. This person has made a commitment to be loving

whether or not the loving feeling is present. ...Conversely, it is not only possible but necessary for a loving person to avoid acting on feelings of love.”

Helen M. Lillie et al tested Communications Theory with data on how couples were coping with the pandemic.

These 5 resilience-building habits seemed to help couples soldier on.

“A problem a lot of couples can face during times of hardship or crisis is relational uncertainty—meaning they aren’t sure how committed they or their partners are or where the relationship is going,” says Helen Lillie, a postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Utah.

According to the school of relationship science known as Communication Theory of Resilience, couples who focus on five habits can weather hard times more easily.

The five techniques are:

1. maintaining some semblance of normalcy with their routines,
2. talking to their spouse as well as sympathetic others about their concerns,
3. reminding themselves of who they are and what they believe,
4. reframing their situation in a more positive or different way and
5. focusing on how good things will be when the crisis is over.

Lillie’s study surveyed 561 people to ascertain whether couples who used those strategies were getting on with their partners better during the pandemic, and found that they did. The study also found humor helped couples cope with the lock down, although it didn’t always improve couple communication.

(Source: “Dyadic coping and discrete emotions during COVID-19: Connecting the communication theory of resilience with relational uncertainty” Helen M. Lillie, Skye Chernichky-Karcher, Maria K. Venetis *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* April 22, 2021 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/02654075211009302> )

I asked for members of the congregation to suggest ways they have coped with the pandemic. A few brave souls responded.

“I finally got to realize my adolescent fantasy by reading a biography of Aeneo Silvio Piccolomini (Pope Pius II) . It had an account of a plague and I read other accounts of plagues.” (Tom Martin)

“What helped me the most to maintain and enhance loving or casual relationships was :ZOOM - meetings, friends, family, college classmates -- some of whom I had not "seen" in years. The ability to see faces really helped to keep me connected to the outside world when I was most quarantined. “(Pam Person)

“I had more frequent phone calls with family and friends. I learned how to use and appreciate Zoom gatherings for social, meeting and worship purposes.

I valued the church connection I maintained by meeting outdoors, socially distanced, with a pod of friends and by working in the gardens with colleagues.” (Bronwen Day)

“What worked:

—Maintaining regular contact with the relationships that were honest and open, and letting the old ones that didn’t fit anymore just drift away. Life seems shorter than it used to be.

—Being humble.

—Verbalizing and showing thanks to others for every little thing.

—Relating via long phone calls instead of emails.

What didn’t work:

—Sending friends technical articles from the BBC, Science, Nature and the NYT.

—Telling people politely “why” they should maintain distance and wear a real mask. “  
(Gianna Settin, PhD)

## **Letting Go**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez Page 35 Love in the Time of Cholera.

“It had not been easy for her to regain her self-control after she heard Digna Pardo’s shriek in the patio and found the old man of her life dying in the mud. Her first reaction was one of hope, because his eyes were open and shining with a radiant light she had never seen there before. She prayed to God to give him at least a moment so that he would not go without knowing how much she had loved him despite all their doubts, and she felt an irresistible longing to begin life with him over again so that they could say what they had left unsaid and do everything right that they had done badly in the past. But she had to give in to the intransigence of death. Her grief exploded into a blind rage against the world, even against herself, and that is what filled her with the control and the courage to face her solitude alone.”

Perhaps the hardest adjustment many have made during the pandemic is loss of family.

In the space of two weeks about ¼ of the Island Nursing Home residents were struck down by COVID. Families were locked out, unable to comfort the dying.

For the millions of people in the US and the many millions abroad, we say a silent prayer of condolence for their loss. May we be compassionate for those who have lost family and friends. May we find hope in the words of Frank Church,

“The greatest of all truths is that love never dies, that every act of love that we perform in this life is carried on into another life and passed on into another life, so that centuries from now the love carries, and that is the work of religion.”

May it be so.

[Jim Announces and Suzanne Shares Screen]

Closing Hymn All You Need Is Love Composed by John Lennon and Performed by the Clementine Duo

<https://youtu.be/XX-eO-8fFK0>

[Lori Spotlights Jim]

Benediction (Paul R. Beedle “Circle of Our Love”)

Come what may, O Spirit of Life,

May we own enough humility that we never need be humbled.

May we own enough compassion that we are never tempted to humiliate.

May we own enough forgiveness that neither the humbled nor the humiliators – who are all so much more – are ever outside the circle of our love.

In the Spirit, by the Spirit, with the Spirit giving power, so may it be.

[Lori Spotlights Wayne]

Postlude - Wayne Smith Rubber Ducky