

Good Morning. It's nice to be back in Muskegon. I appreciate the invitation to return to this wonderful place. I was raised in the village of Lamont not so very far from here and our family attended the Lamont Christian Reformed church, which was the only church in town. This church met my questions like, "Why do people starve? Answer, "It's God's Will don't question it" me, "Why do you think that?". "We have the bible written by God that tells us so". Me, "Why do you think it's written by God"? "Because the bible says it is." I am by nature a questioning person and those kinds of answers didn't do anything but convince me these people knew nothing. This illustrates one of the many issues that led me at a very young age to turn away from anything the CRC did and for quite a while away from anything that had even the whiff of church. But out in the world I discovered the right kind of church can mean diversity, discovery, community, with no rigid dogma. Several years ago my husband Doug and I lived in Muskegon and we enjoyed the services here. Harbor is a great place for someone like me who isn't looking to be preached at by someone who claims to have all the answers with rigid rules for how to live one's life. This is a place to go if you like thinking about life's meaningful questions and want to meet other people who are trying to be the light that this world is missing. While we attended we enjoyed the diversity of subjects that were tackled here. One year during a Harbor flower communion service I thought, this is so pretty.. and cool.. But **Where's The Wine?**. You see I never joined a church that did "communion" and when I was a kid the communion service was a big deal and they served WINE, it was Mogen David wine which I later learned was kosher for passover. That was hilarious to me because we were not taught good things about Jewish people and there sat these judgemental people drinking Jewish wine. But communion felt like a rite of passage I missed. So the flower communion combined with my own weird way of reflecting about the religious practices I watched as a kid led me to search for other types of communion and I found that the Unitarians also had a 'chocolate communion'.

Now I understand that chocolate and wine are very different but I suggest that chocolate can be for everybody - while wine is not. And communion comes after confession so I 'confess' I don't love chocolate unless it's combined with something really good, like caramel. Also, today we are not pretending that chocolate is anything but chocolate. You can't say the same thing about what they do with bread and wine during whatever communion some folk practice where they believe it turns into body and blood. My mom used to tell me there is nothing new under the sun. This is based on a bible

verse, Ecclesiastes 1:9, 'What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.' So I went to those UU sermons and services - because I don't need to reinvent a working wheel. I added some of my own thoughts and I've chosen quotes from books and music I love, but I'd like to acknowledge: Love is Like a Box of Chocolates by Sarah Schurr and Chocolate communion by Rev Chris Rothbauer. And I do want to call out the fact that in this crazy mixed up world somehow people decided that Valentine's Day, which I am not going to get into the dark history of here, has become synonymous with love and chocolate.

So, "What is love?" Rob Sheffield asked in his book "Love is a Mix Tape," *Great minds have been grappling with this question through the ages, and in the modern era, they have come up with many different answers. According to the Western philosopher Pat Benatar, love is a battlefield. Her paisan Frank Sinatra would add the corollary that love is a tender trap. The stoner kids who spent the summer of 1978 looking cool on the hoods of their Trans Ams in the Pierce Elementary School parking lot used to scare us little kids by blasting the (band) Sweet's hit "Love Is Like Oxygen"—you get too much, you get too high, not enough and you're gonna die. Love hurts. Love stinks. Love bites, love bleeds, love is the drug. The troubadours of our times all agree: They want to know what love is, and they want you to show them. But the answer is simple. Love is a mix tape."*

Now if you love music like me you may know exactly what a mix tape means, even in this digital world. Then I would stop talking and we could just get to the chocolate now. But I ask for your patience while we travel together on a journey that delves into why the Greeks had a bunch of different words and definitions for love. And the payoff Will be chocolate.

Love is a word with many, many meanings. I can say, "I love my husband" and I can say, "I love music." Both of these statements are true, but my feeling when I listen to a piece of music is not the same as sharing almost 30 years of traveling this earth together with my true companion. People experience love differently, even love that might look the same on the outside could be completely different when you're living it.

The ancient Greeks used different words for different kinds of love. The headline act in our society would be *Eros*. Eros is the passion that new lovers feel for each other. Like the Roman god Cupid, Eros has a quiver with unlimited bows that are used to overpower reason and incite passion. Eros' passion is what most love songs are about. David Levithan wrote in the book "Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist", "You know the reason The Beatles made it

so big?... 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand.' First single. F(reaking) brilliant. Perhaps the most f(reaking) brilliant song ever written. Because they nailed it. That's what everyone wants. Not 24/7 hot.. sex. Not a marriage that lasts a hundred years. Not a Porsche...or a million-dollar crib. No. They wanna hold your hand. They have such a feeling that they can't hide. Every single successful song of the past fifty years can be traced back to 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand.' And every single successful love story has those unbearable and unbearably exciting moments of hand-holding." This makes eros into a primal and powerful fire - but it burns out quickly. To last - it needs its flame to be fanned through one of the other deeper forms of love, because Eros is centered around the selfish aspects of love, that is, personal infatuation and physical pleasure.

*Pragma* means - love that endures. Those of us who have been together for a long time know that the crazy new-crush feeling of Eros doesn't need to die, it can evolve. Like a bud opening up and becoming a flower. *Pragma* is based on compromise, mutual regard, respect, and tolerance. Staying in love is *Pragma*. You can find *pragma* in couples who've been together for a long time, or in friendships that have endured for decades. Frederik Backman in a 'Man called Ove' wrote, "To love someone is like moving into a house," ..... "At first you fall in love with everything new, you wonder every morning that this is one's own, as if you are afraid that someone will suddenly come tumbling through the door and say that there has been a serious mistake and that you are simply not meant to live so finely. But as the years go by, the facade wears, the wood cracks here and there, and you start to love this house not so much for all the ways it is perfect (but) for all the ways it is not. You become familiar with all its nooks and crannies. How to avoid the key getting stuck in the lock if it is cold outside. Which floorboards have some give when you step on them, and exactly how to open the doors for them not to creak. That's it, all the little secrets that make it your home." Unfortunately *pragma* is a type of love that is not easily found. In fact you don't 'find it'. Ursula Le Guin, in the book *Lathe of Heaven* said, "Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made, like bread; remade all the time, made new." Most of us spend a lot of time and energy trying to find love and very little time in learning how to maintain, to make it. *Pragma* is beyond the physical, it transcends the casual, and is a unique harmony that forms over time.

Then there is *Ludus*, the word means game in Greek. If you don't need stability, belonging or commitment, this could be the type of love you are looking for. There is *Philia*, meaning affectionate regard, friendship, usually

between equals - brotherhood love. You find philia in the word Philadelphia, as is the city of brotherly love. There is the word **Storge**. It's the word for Family love. The love between a parent and child, between siblings or any chosen family that gives you support, love and trust.

**This next Greek** word is tricky. *Philautia*, (fill-ausha) meaning self love. This kind of love needs to be balanced: healthy self-love is about positive self-esteem and happy self-confidence. We need to love ourselves and treat ourselves as valuable people, because doing that helps us take good care of ourselves and provides a base from which we can love others. Self love is the ability to accept yourself and all your imperfections. When you value yourself you know that happiness comes from personal fulfillment not exploiting others. Twisted philautia (fill-ausha) is unhealthy self love. It results in hubris or narcissism. They want attention and want to blame everyone else for their problems. Good self love wants to be heard but doesn't need the spotlight all the time and knows that in life there are mistakes and there can be bad times but there is not necessarily a person to blame for this. There are also many songs about Narcissists. For us older peeps there's the classic "Your so Vain". There's 'Please Bleed' by Ben Harper, (you) "*Make me feel like a beggar, Make me feel like a thief, Make me feel like a battle, that cannot end in peace, ..Make me feel like crying, tears I don't deserve*". Narcissistic people lack empathy and love drama. They don't care if you feel bad and may even enjoy your unhappiness. And it's easy to see that when narcissists are in political office everyone else loses.

Lastly let's talk about *Agape*: the selfless love for other human beings; we often refer to Agape love as compassion or empathy. It is universal love, like the love for strangers, for nature, or if you find it meaningful, god. Buddhists call it Loving-kindness. It does not depend on family or familiarity. Agape can be said to encompass the modern concept of altruism, defined as unselfish concern for the welfare of others. Its motivation for action that we are free to choose or reject. Agape is a sacrificial love that voluntarily suffers inconvenience, discomfort, and even death for the benefit of another without expecting anything in return. **Renee Nicole Good and Alex Jeffrey Pretti** were showing unselfish concern for the welfare of others when they were shot and killed in Minnesota. Altruism, or agape, helps to build and maintain the psychological and social fabric that shields, sustains, and enriches us. Given the visible anger and division in our society we desperately need more agape.

So love, like chocolate, comes in many forms and chocolate, like love, can disappoint. Think about the mass-produced, inexpensive chocolate in items like Easter bunnies and some Valentine chocolate. You see it and say, "Yes, Please." Because it looks like chocolate and it's the color of chocolate, but when you bite it - it's hollow. The taste isn't great because there are so many additives and artificial flavors. Sometimes we keep eating it, thinking that it must be good because it is, after all, chocolate. But really.. It is not good. This is similar to what makes love difficult. You can have something that looks real and it isn't. Another thing that makes love complex is people don't have the same needs. Some people LOVE 70% or higher cocoa content while others swear by 35%. There are those who like White Chocolate and some who say there is no such thing - that's not chocolate. Love is the same because our personalities, our personal history, even our biology affects what we need in a loving relationship. The fluid nature of love is not new. Over 100 years ago in 1923 DH Lawrence wrote, "*no form of love is wrong, so long as it is love, and you yourself honour what you are doing. Love has an extraordinary variety of forms! ... if you deny the variety of love you deny love altogether. If you try to specialize love into one set of accepted feelings, you wound the very soul of love. Love must be multi-form, else it is just tyranny, just death*". 1923! Like my mama said, "there is nothing new under the sun".

The key to living in love, to a love that thrives and lasts is to know what you need and, if you enter a relationship, make sure you care - that you want to discover what the other person needs. The flip side of this is that they care and want to discover what you need. That's how you make the perfect mix tape.

Today we are using chocolate as a symbol of love. Everyone who wishes to, is invited to take part in our Chocolate Communion. We don't sort out who is worthy or who is a member. We come together to enjoy chocolate, to give thanks for the bounty of the earth, and to confirm the ideals that communion symbolizes. Communion is not just some abstract creed. It is Fellowship, it is reaching for understanding. It's a shared moment.

Communion can be a deed, an act of mindfulness. I invite you to engage in this Chocolate Communion as an act of mindfulness.

### **The Communion**

So come up to the baskets on this table. The baskets have different types of chocolate in them. Please take one piece of chocolate and go back to your pew, sit down, and please **wait** before you unwrap it. Please don't eat it yet because we are going to do a chocolate meditation together.

(After everyone is seated) We have each chosen a piece of chocolate. This chocolate in our hands is a symbol of the way our community loves and cares for one another. As we prepare to eat it, please take a moment to consider what you hold. Let's reflect on the long journey from the cacao tree that can only grow somewhere near the equator to this piece of chocolate in your hand at this moment. I'd like to offer thanks to the earth for its sweetness.

Now relax and either close your eyes or not as we enter a moment of mindfulness. Be aware of where you are. Here we know in our hearts that this community is a place that offers love and peace in a society that often does not. Here is a place of acceptance and joy. May the pleasure these pieces of chocolate give our taste buds be reminders of the joy that comes from building a Beloved Community, and may we find new ways throughout the year to love and care for one another.

Okay open your eyes and go ahead and unwrap your piece of chocolate and eat it however you choose. Try to really experience the chocolate. Take this moment to enjoy the taste and texture.

**Closing words:** Thank you for participating in our Chocolate Communion and for allowing me to explore a ritual I observed many times as a child in a different and inclusive way. I hope you have enjoyed the way we examined how love and chocolate have similarities. Both can involve some choice and some disappointment. Love and chocolate can bring you joy but can also be messy. Different people have different tastes and different desires. But know that your love and your life are honored here. I hope the taste of today's chocolate reminds us each time we taste chocolate that we are part of a loving, caring community that values us for who we are.

(If there is any chocolate left,)

We invite you to take a piece with you. Please share it with someone that wasn't able to be here today so they can also feel loved and cared for. Let it be a reminder that our service doesn't end when we leave on Sunday morning, but continues throughout our week in all the faces we meet.

Margaret Renkl's book, [The Comfort of Crows: A Backyard Year](#), processes change and death, aging, and becoming an empty nester, the COVID-19 pandemic, encroaching development in her neighborhood, and climate change. It starts in the winter and has a chapter for each of the 52 weeks of the year. Part memoir,

part nature study, this book encourages us to treasure the living beings who surround us with each breath we take.

**OPENING** "To follow politics these days is to court bewilderment, denial, complete despair. Too often I feel I am living in a country I no longer recognize, a country determined to imperil every principle I hold dear and many of the people I love, too. Immersing myself in the natural world of my own backyard—or the nearby parks and greenways, or the woods surrounding our friends' cabin on the Cumberland Plateau—is the way I cope with whatever I think I cannot bear. I'm not trying to hide from the truth but to balance it, to remind myself that there are other truths, too. I need to remember that the earth, fragile as it is, remains heartbreakingly beautiful. I need to give my attention to a realm that is indifferent to fretful human mutterings and naked human anger, a world unaware of the hatred and distrust taking over the news."

Chalice lighting **We unite in our differences**

We unite in our differences in background and belief;  
We unite—with gratitude and hope:  
Hope for a world of differences;  
Hope for a world that honors difference;  
We unite in community  
With gratitude for difference.

Chalice closing

**We extinguish this flame,**  
But the sparks within us remain alight.  
From each of us, in our supposed solitude,  
The signals buzz and hum, sparkling through space one to another,  
Connecting us invisibly  
But palpably.

We are one.  
And from every window,  
Our light shines.

By Amy Zucker Morgenstern