

# *Speaking in Tongues*

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

*Rev. Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel*

21 February, 2021



*Love Locks - Distillery District Toronto © 2020 Rod. E.S.Q.*

There's a song by the band The Magnetic Fields, called *The Book of Love*, which talks about how “the book of love is long and boring”, going on to say that no one can lift the thing, as it's “full of charts, and facts, and figures... and instructions for dancing”, as well as full of music – some of which can be transcendental, while some it... less so. According to the song, the “book of love” is full of gifts, but the singers are more partial to the act of gifting itself – at least at first glance.

And putting aside the metaphorical immenseness of this book, the singers affirm that they like to express their care by reading to each other, singing to each other, or giving each other gifts... the singers even express a specific desire for wedding rings as the gift of choice.

The song has a neat mix of cynicism and idealism in it, commenting on the complex and over-calculated advice on how to find and maintain love, while also proposing that a variety of simple expressions of love may do the job just fine.

I'll say that, when the song comments on the sheer magnitude of "the book of love" making it impossible to lift, I believe it.

For six years, I sold books at a large book retailer, and there was *a lot* written about love. The store, of course, only held a fraction of all that has been written about it, but I'm sure that no one person could lift even a portion of the "books of love" that I sold.

The actual section labeled as "love" was relatively small – at least compared to other sections, such as history, or programming languages, or fiction. In fact, the section for "love" wasn't actually labelled "love", but there were rather subsections, usually under Self-help, for relationships, dating, sex, and things we're supposedly too young to know. Many of these books are full of charts, facts, and figures... and instructions for dancing – we had those too. In a secluded corner of the fiction section, there was also a modest erotica shelf.

Erotica, of course, coming from *eros* – one of the Greek words for understanding *one* way of expressing love, along with words like *agape*, *storge*, and *philia*. All translatable to "love" in English, but referring to its different dimensions, like the familial love of a parent to a child, or siblings' fondness for each other, or friends caring for each other, or physical ways of expressing close intimacy. These exist in the English-speaking world as well... but Greek can sometimes be more precise about these things.

But the fact is, the bulk of the books in the store were, more often than not, *somehow* related to love, writ large. Most fiction books had at least some romantic subplot, or an epic journey by protagonists doing grand things for the sake of the people who mattered most to them.

I came across the Sufi poet Rumi's poetry on love in the religion section. And a lot of that section was about love, writ large, including promises of boundless, universal love, grace and forgiveness, and unconditional caring. The Bible alone has a whole array of the dimensions of love, including all the Greek categories of *agape*, *storge*,

and *philia*... and even erotica – if you know where to look (hint: it's the Song of Solomon).

Interestingly, many of the folks who came to the store were often looking, not specifically for books *about* love, but books to *express* their love – gifts for someone who they care for. One of the *easiest* parts of my job was finding the shelf where a specific book was, while one of the *hardest* parts was finding *the* book that someone was looking for... when it was a book for someone else. It required quite a bit of listening, and some strategic questions, and it also gave me insight about the extent to which the customer had been listening to the special people in their lives.

One of the “books of love” that I ran into, and which was very popular while I was employed at the bookstore, was *The Five Love Languages*, by Gary Chapman. Chapman is a Baptist pastor, and also holds a degree in anthropology. He developed a working theory that people tend to express their caring in five main ways. Quickly, I'll say that he lists these five different ways as: 1) words of affirmation, 2) quality time, 3) receiving gifts, 4) acts of service, and 5) physical touch.

Now, I'm not going spend a lot of time laying out Gary Chapman's thesis, or promoting it. If you're curious, there're plenty of resources online for that – along with the books. And while the scholarship on it is sparse, these love languages, as described by Chapman, are recognizable expressions of caring that we may be familiar with, and we may already intuitively have a preference for one or two of these.

Now I'm wary of subscribing to the orthodoxy of numbered lists. I can't say with certainty if, in reality, people have *five* love languages, or three, or fifteen. Or if the five can have subcategories, or be amalgamated. But in essence, I can appreciate Chapman's thesis as a worldview that can help make sense of some of the ways that people express themselves to each other, as well as the discrepancies between people, when they seek to relate with one another.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect from this outlook, in my opinion, is the enhanced awareness that it can bring for recognizing that: yes – people express themselves differently, and that taking some care to appreciate how others express their care might help us deepen our connections with others, as well as help us understand when there are disconnects... such as when our expressions of affection don't land well with others, or when we're confused by the way that others might be trying to connect with us.

It looks like the musical group The Magnetic Fields were on to something when they wrote and sang *The Book of Love*. They talk about different expressions of love – love languages, if you will – spending quality time reading to each other, singing to each other, or giving gifts to each other... in their case, the song specifies wedding rings.

We know that having wedding rings isn't a reality for everyone. Many of you have them, and many of you don't. Some of you *used to* have wedding rings, but don't anymore, for a whole variety of reasons... some of these may be tragic reasons, and some of these reasons might have come from an awareness that you were better off without those rings. Some of you don't have rings... yet, and some of you have fought for your right to wear them proudly. Some of you will never, or don't ever want to, have them. Different languages speak different to your selves. And in this church, all are welcome.

My friends, today is Language Movement Day in Bangladesh, and from this, UNESCO derived World Mother Tongue Day, as a way to recognize that the languages that we come from, and that we hold dear to our heart, are an integral part of us. Sometimes, a mother tongue may be a different language than what is spoken where you now live – I have some experience with that.

Languages come in many flavours – with their own sounds and shapes. Sign languages, and reading lips, are part of how some members of our community understand others... sometimes from birth, and other times,

as we get older. However it is that we need to express ourselves, or understand others' expressions, our spiritual imperative is to seek out our companions' language of their soul, as we look to close the gap in our connections.

My friends, almost every Sunday, I invite folks to stay for Coffee & Conversation after the service, be it at the dining room in our building, when we've met in-person, or on our breakout groups when we meet online. And even though you don't need my permission, I also make it clear that it's OK to "tiptoe" out toward the proverbial door at that time. Because I know that informal coffee and conversation is not always the way that everyone feels most connected in our church – it may not be your "love language". For some folks it's the opposite: church hasn't happened until a good informal conversation has been had.

However it is that you express your loving and your caring, in our church we seek to affirm that love... without exceptions.

So may it be,  
In Solidarity and Love,  
Amen

Copyright © 2021 Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel

*Suggested Hymns:*

**Opening Hymn #34 Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire**

Words: Hal Hopson, 1933- , (1 Corinthians 13:1-3), © 1972 Hope Publishing Co.

Music: Trad. English melody, adapt. by Hal Hopson, 1933- , © 1972 Hope Publishing Co.

GIFT OF LOVE

**Hymn #149 Lift Every Voice and Sing**

Words: James Weldon Johnson, 1871-1938

Music: J. Rosamond Johnson, 1873-1964

© 1921 Edward B. Marks Music Co., renewed

LIFT EVERY VOICE

**#131 Love Will Guide Us**

Words: Sally Rogers, © 1985 Sally Rogers, used by perm. of Thrushwood Press

~)-| Music: Traditional, arr. by Betty A Wylder, 1923-1994

© 1992 UUA

OLYMPIA