**2015: The Year of Love**

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We are coming to the end of the year when holiday celebrations overshadow the ongoing realities of war, poverty and violence. For a moment the good cheer (and good spirits) lighten our hearts and dull our worried minds. Life *is*good when it is celebrated with friends and family at Christmas and, in many ways, this time of celebration nourishes us for the New Year ahead. December 25 is like hitting the pause button on your computer or television and saying – Wow! It reminds us that we are deeply relational beings; that community and love bind us in ways that transcend our differences; that a shared life is possible.

As we look toward a New Year, I would like to declare 2015 the Year of Love. I do not mean love as sentiment or emotion but love as the highest good, the deep relationality of being itself.

Love is the energy of union, the space between hearts where forgiveness, compassion, joy, thanksgiving and peace flourish in the birthing of oneness. I want to proclaim 2015 as the Year of Love because we are inwardly bone dry and it is time to return the deepest energy of life itself, namely, love. “Love,” Teilhard de Chardin wrote, “is the physical structure of the universe.”  Love is present, he said, from the Big Bang onward: “Even among the molecules, love is the building power that works against entropy, and under its attraction the elements feel their way towards union.”

For so long we have kept love outside the limits of nature, as if it is a peculiarly human emotion that we develop. Hard core scientists and ivory tower intellectuals are easily annoyed by love-talk, as if their precious time is being wasted with sentimental silliness. Yet, apart from love we are not at home in the cosmos – literally. Theologian Philip Hefner asks, “can we entertain the hypothesis that love is rooted in the fundamental nature of reality, including the reality we call nature?”

In his poem, “The Eternal Feminine” Teilhard wrote of love in the voice of wisdom: “I am embedded in the force field that is driving the cosmos towards greater novelty, towards greater integrity, and eventually towards greater consciousness. . . . I am the principle of union, the soul of the world. I am the magnetic and unitive force that brings the disparate matter together and urges each newly created form to multiply, to beautify, and to bear fruit. . . . Each step towards union moves my creation towards greater spontaneity and freedom.”

While modernity has reduced love to sentiment and emotion, supplanting love with knowledge and the will to power, postmodernity has relativized love to feeling, making it as facile as a Facebook page of “like” or “dislike.” We no longer hold love as the goal of knowledge or true power or the core of happiness. Yet, love is embedded in the fabric of the universe. It undergirds the deep connectivity that marks cosmic life, from quantum reality to the galaxies and conscious human life.

Physicists today tell us that everything in the universe is, in a sense, “genetically” related; interconnectedness lies at the core of all that exists. The universe is bound together in a communion, each thing with all the rest. “If there was no internal propensity to unite, even at a rudimentary level – indeed in the molecule itself,” Teilhard said, “it would be physically impossible for love to appear higher up, in a hominized form.”

The poet Wallace Stevens wrote, “Nothing is itself taken alone. Things are because of interrelations or interactions.” When one lives from a deep consciousness of love as the bond of interconnectedness, one lives in God because God is love, a communion of persons intertwined in the flow of love. To live in God is to live in deep communion, to know oneself as part of a whole.

Recently, I was reading the diary of Etty Hillesum, the young Jewish woman who died in a WWII Nazi concentration camp in 1943. Etty describes herself as a person who loved life. During her period of confinement, she recorded her inner life and struggles, revealing a young woman on the cusp of a literary career cut short by the war and in the midst of the most horrible of circumstances.

Confined in the grim barracks of a concentration camp, she started to pray – almost spontaneously – and began to focus her mind on God in a way that expanded her inner space. As her mind became centered on love and divine presence, she came to new insights on her own sense of personhood and realized her deep connectivity to others. “Each of us moves things along in the direction of war,” she said, “every time we fail in love.”

“All disasters stem from us. Why is there war? Perhaps because now and then I might be inclined to snap at my neighbor. Because I and my neighbor and everyone else do not have enough love. . . . Yet there is love bound up inside us, and if we could release it into the world, a little each day, we would be fighting war and everything that comes with it.”

Etty’s deep insights resonate with what scientists have discovered: local changes can have global effects because we are deeply connected by fields of energy. Our thoughts as well as our actions impact one another, even if we are spatially separated because in our cosmic roots we are deeply entwined.

Etty had to confront the chaos in her own undisciplined mind in order to confront directly the forces in human consciousness that had given rise to Nazism in the first place. She realized that absolute love does not save us from suffering but empowers us to create life, even in the midst of suffering. Her mindful attunement to God meant living in the flow between immense suffering and daily moments of beauty. One moment she would tend to a dying mother lying on the cold, concrete prison floor with her children standing nearby, and in the next moment she would marvel at a small buttercup pressing through the cracks of the same prison floor. Instead of trying to push out suffering, she opened to it lovingly, leaning into it, because she realized that sadness too was part of her being.

Through a mindful vigilance of God’s nearness and a resistance to the negative emotions of suffering and death, Etty consciously rooted herself in Omega love, tending to the needs of her suffering family and friends without succumbing to despair. Carol Flinders writes: “Because she learned how to let go of the merely personal, she could fully receive the sorrows of others without holding on to them – she knew in effect how to lift the gate and let the grief flow on out of her. Everything could circulate through her. Joy, grief, anger, despair and of course love above all must be able to circulate through ourselves and one another and all of life.”

The life of Etty Hillesum shows us what is possible and what we are capable of, even in the midst of suffering and violence. We have the capacity to love in a way that kindles unity, truth, goodness and beauty. We are created for love and until we return to love as the root source of life, we will continue to unravel. If we want a different world, we must become a different people. Perhaps that is why Jesus left us the law of love, that we may live from a deeper center, a new mind and heart; to become a new people, to co-create a new world of justice and peace.

If it is love that moves the sun and the other stars, as Dante once wrote, then love must move us as well if we are to be at home with one another in this cosmos.

May 2015 be the Year of Love.