

Love & Belonging
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Introduction

As a black gay poet, public theologian, and pastor, who has not pastored a church yet, my multiple identities are moved, reordered and managed through writing and language by the holy spirit, so that I might have a word for you. I consider you. I pray on behalf of you. I don't know you all by name, but somehow your names get to God when I pray for this community.

In free verse, metered rhyme, strict poetic forms. I preach. I poet. I tweet. I status. I move words around the page until they recognize one another, find their relationships, become pattern, disrupt learned writing and move into instinct, gut, and muscle memory. Somehow your names get to God when I poet for this community.

I hear voices. I write them down. I am learning that I can be broken and spoken through. That god speaks in love with the renewing of god's people. God does not throw god's voice. God is not Edgar Bergen & I am not Effie Klinker, God is not Wayland Flowers & I am not Madame, God is not Shari Lewis & Christ was not the Lamb Chop.

God is love. And I have it on good report, that God loves you.

There is a new Pentecost for us when the cost is this high. We are the thing hard to swallow. Our Adam's apples and our breasts will confound and confuse the multitudes. Our cancer in remission will astonish. Our laughing with death when it comes for our loved ones will seem absurd. Our living into ages we could not imagine will drive speculators crazy. Ours is a complex rhythm. A new cloud to witness. A new jawbone. No puppetry. They will hear what god has sent ahead to us and through, us and god's name will be witness.

We are called to speak in love.
We are called to listen when a tongue is untied.

Section I

We are called to speak about God's love anew and fresh and into this moment.

Our successes will be measured not by the glass ceilings that we have broken through but by the love ceilings that we have ascended beyond.

I want to talk to you about love like that...and run by you, some of my ideas about love.

Like, "glass ceilings and love", and work as the only place that requires your dedication and not your love. Your workplace requires you to jump through hoops, fight for fair wages and crash through that glass ceiling. But your loveplace, that you have been recruited for, promoted for, given a raise for, has a love ceiling and a love floor, it is the same distance beneath you as above you. It requires no force. Nobody to climb over. No deals with no devils. No overtime to prove you're a team player. Love recruits and promotes from within.

I want to speak in love with you.

In your mind or with your finger, draw a circle. Let's call that circle "Love".

Now place yourself in that circle and whisper, "I love you." Notice how no matter where you are standing in that circle, love bounces off the walls and finds its way back to you? It has too.

Now imagine you and someone else inside the circle that you have drawn in your mind or in the air with your finger. Same love. Same circle.

See yourself standing back to back with them in the circle. Imagine both of you saying, "I love you." away from one another towards the love circumference. Notice how love is curvilinear?

Notice how it bends over backwards to reach you? Notice, no matter where you are in it, as long as you are in it, you are its intended.

See, you have to see yourself "in love". Look and marvel at love's capacity, its contraction and expansion. You have to know your Loveland, its boundaries, territory, reach, leaks. You have to know that when you place yourself, your potential or present life partner, your house, your block, your family, your neighborhood, your city, your state, and your country in that circle, then everybody is "IN LOVE" with you. And no one can love and hate at the same time.

Let's try speaking in love:

Like, Love is a lamp. If you want love to light you up, then pull the cord, turn it on. All this time we have been led to believe that we are in a love shortage and that we should be conserving our energy to love and THAT has left us in the dark. Despite the threat of a large love bill we should leave all our love lights on all the time! Now is not the time for a love crises. **FLIP THE SWITCH!**

How about this:

Love is aware. Love is paying attention. Love knows that you have your recovery to deal with, some bills to catch up on, and some self-esteem issues to work out. The thing is, Love knows you better than you know your self. Love is in this with you.

Love...

We must begin to look at one another with a presumption of innocence. We must love one another as if it is not only possible, but likely and necessary. Love, loves THE WHO, that people say that are and not THE WHAT we need them to be. Love begins when we see ourselves as a part of our own beauty standards.

Love...

Is primal and Love's primary purpose is to unlock and unleash the love lessons and mysteries that are in our DNA. Love is ancestral and honors the spiritual, neurological, familial, psychic and community lessons that have been passed on to us through blood, through sweat and through tears.

- Love always lures us "towards" and unites us "with" the justice and the divine.
- Love always points towards what we do have and not what we lack.
- Love moves us. Love is a movement. You cannot be stuck and in love.
- Love matches our speed, tempo, rhythm and pace. Love is a partner dance and whether or not we have rhythm is beside the point. Love leads us all. Love recognizes that we are all instruments. Love plays us. Love sends

forth music makers. Love is an ensemble. Love is a band that changes things. Love is how we participate in the great orchestration of life.

- Take note, Love is not a Whitney Houston song. I am not supposed to save all my love for you. Love is like milk. Love has to be used or love will go bad. Love can clabbor.

See...

- Love is declaration, “Nobody alone. **Ever.** Nobody without. **Ever.** Our love is not salaried. No withholdings. No tax. No loopholes. No exemptions. **Ever.** Love means you get it all back. Love returns.”

Speaking in love allows us to recognize that:

- Suffering, failure and hitting rock bottom does not make you appreciate love with more intensity. Love is not the reward for losing everything. Love is its own thing. It can as easily give itself to the wretched as it could to the rich. Don't check your love answer by the person who say they took the same love test as you and seemingly got all the questions right. Your love answer is your love answer. You can come up with another one but it's always gon' be yours. The answer to loves question is always, “All of Thee above.”

See:

- When we speak in love we begin to understand that whatever love limits we place on someone else, exponentially limits the love possibilities for us, AND the converse--- whatever hope in love we place on those who we don't think THEY deserve it, exponentially expands the love hope for ourselves.

When I talk about speaking in love:

I believe that the subject and matter of Christ is love, incarnational and available to all of humanity. Love uses Christ's life and ministry as well as the historical genesis and sweep of Christianity to point to a contemporary application of what it means to be a Christian. Love evidences the lingering divinity available to all. Love is revelation. Love is revolution. Love is hungry. Love is gathering. Love is being of service. Love is ever-advancing. Love does not leave us. Love requires us to do the work of connecting the story of Christ to all contemporary struggles of God's peoples. Love has to clean up, end, change, transform, free, overturn, break-down, or dismantle any system that seeks to oppress God's people. All people are God's people. All people are loved. We stall Christ's mission by not participating fully in the restoration of joy and peace in the world. We slow down the advance by not clearing a social justice pathway through which Christ might join us. Christ does not like to step over bodies. We must do the work of making the world safe for Christ's return. This is what love looks like.

But In order to speak in love we might have to read the bible with new vision. We have to use new tools and go to extraordinary lengths to locate the silenced voices in the bible. More than applying a hermeneutics of suspicion. We have to read to the places where people have been told to wait for love.

We have to read to the place where someone had to scheme, rig and lower their body into a healer's presence.

We have to read into the system that has locked someone out who is in bad shape, under insured and are forced to go to extraordinary lengths for help.

Somebody needs to hear you calling out to them. Speaking in love says you understand what they are going through. That you have been there. That you are not so far churchd that you cannot speak in hurt and brokenness and hope and redemption.

Speaking in love believes the victim first:

Something ain't right.

She didn't have that bruise or that issue when I left.

What you mean, “She “became” pregnant?”

How come only the people in this part town, near this temple get leprosy?

Who you supposed gon have to clean up after that last supper?

We don't ASK to speak in love, we HAVE to speak in love. If our god is still speaking, then god is speaking in love.

Our speaking in love is tied to our freedom.

Speaking in love has always been so revolutionary. This world wants to control you and your narrative. Seeks to decide that you are not a person with a voice. Worthy or not worthy of love. That your love doesn't exist in the way that you know it does.

But Our speaking in love beloved, means self-making...but not just making...but our mapping and loving and making and leaving a way for everybody to belong to one another. Yes, our cartography. Speaking in love does the opposite of silencing. You cannot hear them talking about you when you are speaking in love.

We are called to speak in love and now that it is about our voices joined and raised in love, we can see that it's all rigged. They are trying to convince you that the crime that you're being charged with is that you were gay, black, a woman, body type and gender non-conforming but why they are really crucifying you is because you dared to love yourself in front of them. You dared to speak up.

And now that we have named it, we know that our job as faith leaders, justice workers, scholars and community folk is to be practitioners of this new tongue, to offer a second opinion to all love sick people, who have been misdiagnosed by the world, by the academy and by the church.

And now that you know someone thinks you sound like love. You will know that speaking in love is a coming out and a coming in. It says that “I join myself with this moment and to this movement and I cannot be extracted from it.” Speaking in love means that justice which was once a steep hill now leaves a voice trailing that the person coming behind can follow.

Speaking in love is the way you get bees in your yard. Our speaking in love is the cornflower and verbena and Sweet William. Love makes it all come to you, and come back to you, because you are attractive.

Our speaking in love is neither started nor finished. Our speaking in love is not capacity or effort. isn't drive or ambition. ain't first place or laurels to rest on. And if there is sin, it is that we see people out there by themselves and we let them think that they we cannot understand or speak to their pain. That they are unloved. That our survivals are not linked in a language of love.

We are speaking in love!

Love is a new tongue.

Love never gets tired of repeating itself.

Love says itself over and over and over again until we all get it.

Because they will never come running out of what they are trapped or caught in if they have never heard anyone call out to them in love.

We are a love story.

Its Love's “Ontological Question.” It's a question about existence.

Who gets to be in love?

- Who gets to exist in love?
- Who decides and by default who does not exist in love?
- Who is othered when we talk about love?
- And do we belong to one another?

Love's ontological question is a deep inquiry that makes a stranger friend:

What you been up to?

You doin' something different with your hair?

Have you been taking of your "thing?"

How is your job search coming?

You making ends meet?

When was the last time you ate?

You got my number, right?

Love's ontological question then turns that friend into your family:

How can I help?

Can somebody take you in?

Who else can you call?

1 to 10. Where is this on your dangerously close to bottom scale?

What happens at 10?

How are you staying connected to folks?

Who are you telling the whole truth to?

Are you loving yourself?

Do you know how to?

If we are really in this with each other, we have to know one another, deeper than in passing and deeper than weekly.

I read the bible through love's ontological lens and I can hear "othered" voices calling out from the bible, voices of people, who like me, who never expected to find love.

I have to listen to them tell their stories.

Now that I know that shame is the opposite of visibility and belonging, I feel like it is my job and my responsibility to lift them up. They are mine. I cannot be afraid of my own. They talk to me in my dreams and they are buried under rubble that is no fault of their own. I hear them crying, "I have lost myself." I have to bring them into existence. I have to make room in my heartspace for them. I have to make sure that they are not othered. I have to somehow hold their faces in my hands, look into their eyes, and ask, "**Do you know that I cannot sleep until I know you are home? Do you know that I don't have a story without you in it? Do you know that I love you.**"

The bible does a great job of making us think we know everybody in the bible because we have read about them. But if you read it through a hermeneutics of love, it encourages us to not just know "these" people but actually claim them as "our" people. How are you really doing?

The answer is that we are called to be in love.

Because our love is our freedom not from each other but in each other,

Are you safe?

Are you getting support?

You know he know wrong, right?

What's the lesson of these angels now?

You know aint no other shoe gon drop right?

When am I gonna see you again?

You know that you are not dispensable, right?

Love stops us from denying personhood to the poor, the marginalized and the disenfranchised.

Love brings everyone into existence. It says you exist exactly in the way that you believe you do.

Because...

I love you and I consider you.

I love you and I cast a prayer net deep and wide over you.

Love says we are the returns and the investments of learning and remembrance and healing and joy and discovery.

The love between us has become an irreducible fact in the universe, a contribution to an immortal love story told long before we got here and told long after.

Love says we tap into ancestral knowledge about forgiveness and that there is something in the universe that attends that pain and that hurt.

Love is a discipline. Love is a spiritual practice. Love is a process.

love's body does not allow you to feel depleted or diminished.

Love says we are a community. We womanish. We love strong.

Love says that there is no hiding one from another. If you lost we will come and get you. If they are lying about you we will tell the truth of you. Love says that you are exonerated.

Love says that we can heal in front of each other. That there are no elephant graveyards among us.

Love is beyond Old and New Testament, we're living into the new evidence now, we are the first collected books of a new bible, a bible that belongs to us, is about us is for us, A Book of Love, A Higher Love, A Love Bible, where Our Name Be Witness.

Benediction

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Now imagine you and someone else, say, us, inside the circle that you have drawn in your mind or in the air with your finger. Same love. Same circle.

See yourself standing back to back with them in the circle. Imagine all of us saying, "I love you." away from one another towards the love circumference. Notice how love is curvilinear?

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See, I am "in love" with you all. Look and marvel at our love's capacity, its contraction and expansion. Look at our Loveland, its boundaries, territory, reach, leaks. You have to know, that when we place ourselves, our potential or present life partners, our homes, our blocks, our families, our neighborhoods, our cities, our states, and our country in that circle, then everybody is **"IN LOVE"**.

And no one can love and hate at the same time.

Thank you and amen.