

Ah, Valentine's Day, whose origins date back to the early church, honoring a saint named Valentinus, who was imprisoned and eventually executed for performing weddings for Roman soldiers forbidden to marry. Love always cost us something. Back when I was a kid, there was a countercultural movement promoting *free love*, mostly promoted by men who wanted sex without responsibility or sacrifice. It didn't work, because real love always costs something. Legend has it that just before he was killed, Valentinus healed the daughter of his jailer, whom he loved. His last act was to send her a farewell letter signed *Your Valentine*, thus beginning a tradition that continues to this day, celebrated by children and adults alike.

I remember when I was a kid, going to Danner's Five and Dime and buying a box of Valentine cards to give to my classmates. Kids still do that, by the way. Joan told me the kids at her school had a little party and gave one another cards and ate those chalky little hearts that say *Real Love* and *Hug Me* and *Be Mine* and *Let's Kiss*.

A little girl came up to Joan this past week and said, "I have a Valentine's present for you."

Joan said, "Oh, that's very sweet. What is it?"

"It's a secret," the girl said, "I can't tell you. But do you like root beer Dum-Dum suckers?"

I loved when love was so simple. Because I've not found real love to be all that simple. A man in Danville recently asked to meet with me. He was having marital problems and needed to talk with someone, so I invited him to come over to our house and we'd talk. He came and told me all the things wrong with his marriage, then asked, "Why does it have to be this hard?"

I said, "What do you mean by *it*? What's *it*?"

He said, "Love. Why's it so difficult?"

I said, "Because it's totally worth it."

Worth the heartbreak, and heartbreak is always a possibility when one decides to love.

Worth the potential for misunderstanding, and there is always the potential for misunderstanding when one decides to love.

Worth even the loss of the beloved, and the loss of the beloved is inevitable when one decides to love.

I've never in my life had anything worthwhile that didn't cost. Love always cost something.

I saw a picture of someone at a Bernie Sander's rally this week holding up a sign that read *Free Health Care*. Now I love Bernie Sanders. Probably going to vote for him, which doesn't mean you have to. You vote for who you want to. And I'm all in favor of universal health care. We should have had it a long time ago. But it isn't going to be free. It's going to cost us all something. I don't know anything worthwhile that doesn't cost something.

So how much should love cost?

Love should never cost us our dignity, though it might cost us our pride. Especially if our pride keeps us from ever saying, “I am sorry,” or “I will do better,” or “Please forgive me.”

How much should love cost?

Love should never cost us our integrity, though it will cost us the difficulty of honest communication. Especially those difficult words not easily said or easily heard. On several occasions over the years, my wife, I won't mention her name, no sense in embarrassing her, has told me I was being self-centered. It wasn't easy for her to say it, it wasn't easy for me to hear it. But love costs.

How much should love cost?

It should never cost us to forsake our deeply held values, though love will cause us to regularly examine our values and sometimes let go of things we once thought were all-important.

Everything worthwhile costs.

When I was a kid, I thought love was all cards and candy hearts, but you learn. I read a story this week about a mother who donated a kidney to her teenage son. Everyone was saying how remarkable it was that she would do that. But every parent in this room would do that for their child. Everything worthwhile costs. Don't have children if you aren't willing to give up a kidney one day. Everything worthwhile costs.

You read the gospels and you see these mentions of Jesus having to get away by himself because he'd been loving people so deeply, he would exhaust himself. Had to slip away now and then to recuperate. Everything worthwhile costs. Love is hard work, the hardest work of all. Don't believe it if anyone tells you otherwise, who tells you love should be easy.

When I first became a pastor, our Quaker superintendent was Bob Garris, who is just a wonderful man. Whenever there was a disagreeable task he wanted me to do, he'd phone and say, "I have a wonderful opportunity for you." Bob was married to Elsie, who had Parkinson's disease and was confined to a nursing home in her last years of life. Bob went every day to sit with her and feed her and make sure she was clean. I'd stop in to visit them from time to time.

After Elsie passed away, I was visiting with Bob and said to him, "I know caring for Elsie was a lot of work."

He said, "Yes, it was, but more than that, it was an honor."

It never says that on candy hearts, leading us to believe, when we're young, that love is easy and uncomplicated. Life teaches us otherwise, that love is difficult, but also honorable. In the spirit of Saint Valentinus, who knew all too well the cost of love, I wish you the blessings of affection and friendship on this high and holy day.