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There's more than enough cleverness already. What we need more of is loving-kindness.

"All You Need is...."

Finding clarity takes a long time – a lifetime for Michael. At 73, he realized that the goal of life wasn't to be the cleverest. No, it was to love.

Stricken by a rare form of ALS, in his last months Michael Projansky narrated the stories from his life that stand out for him today because they have led him to see love more clearly. At his request, friends turned his stories into this book. It's called *i don't know – i love*. In the preface he writes, "I have an impulse to go back and say to everyone that I did not love you as much as I could have – I am sorry. After a lifetime of self-doubt and self-criticism, I am tired of that now."¹

Who's familiar with self-doubt and self-criticism? We can let that kind of thinking occupy a lot of real estate in our heads. It takes us away from each other and turns us inward into little solitudes of worry. "Am I measuring up? Who do I think I am? What are people thinking of me?" Sometimes we let our minds run the show.

Our devices don't help. Look how hooked we are on consuming and wielding more and more information. Think how much time we spend looking down at a screen when we could be looking up – amazed and healed by the beauty of the world.

A former mentor of my husband, now well into his 80s, came through a few months ago and gave us this book, which he helped edit and publish. He has retired. Sharp as a tack and interested in all kinds of things. A hard-working executive all his adult life, he found it fascinating that the author, Michael Projansky – a big, bright thinker with a Ph.D. in clinical psychology – had taken an entirely different tack in his life, devoting it not to achievement and material success but to the spiritual path.

Collaborating with him on the book had a profound impact on our friend, most especially the author's strong conclusion that, with all he had accomplished and done in life, so much of the world he had seen, love was what mattered the most. Love is what he wished he'd done more of.

Only now, at the end, did he see how much time he wasted, living in his head. "I have wandered the world," he wrote," and found myself back where I started. The whole issue was the distance from my heart to my head and back again – a distance of less than a foot and a half."² If only he had applied himself to loving all that time.

Instead of loving others, which he believes was the purpose he was born with, he says, "I lost that clear sense of purpose and got distracted by being a bright, white man. I moved from my

¹ Michael Maruti Projansky, *i don't know – i love...A few entries from the log of a human voyage.* Rhinebeck, NY: Epigraph Books, 2019, p.3.

² Ibid.

heart to my head. And learned the black arts of cleverness....I made the mistake of accepting thought and cleverness for wisdom and in the course of that lost myself to the mind's machinations. There's more than enough cleverness already. What we need more of is loving-kindness. That has been and is the central task of every human life: to change cleverness into loving-kindness for all."³

We who have gathered here this morning are given this time, this place, this faith tradition, this challenge to live into what we call "Beloved Community." Being here is an invitation to love. We are given *each other* to love. What do we mean when we begin every service with the words, "Love is the spirit of this fellowship"? That we take off our everyday armor at the door and climb these stairs ready to love? You bet.

It's what makes the world go around. We long for love. We live for it. Falling in love, sure, but we live for everyday love, too. Think how good it feels to know that someone loves you. Not just accepts and sees you but appreciates you for who you are – no matter what you do, what mistakes you make, no matter how often you miss the mark or let others down.

Think of people who have loved you this way. Taken an interest in you and taught you the tenderness, the safety, the sweetness and comfort, the steadiness of love. There's nothing like it, is there? Nothing like the loving gaze of such a person, such a pet.

A UU friend, long active in AA (Alcoholics Anonymous), finds love there. 12-Step programs, characterized by free meetings and open to anyone, emphasize the role of a higher power in recovery. How did my humanist friend deal with that, I wondered? He said he was long over resisting that language. He sees his higher power as the group itself, the love in the circle of people in the room. For him the AA community is all about love. "It's easy," he said. "I know exactly who will be at my bedside at the end."

People experience unconditional love in the mystery, the ground of being that some call God. My cousin Sally is a Christian Science practitioner. She lives with a deep, steady faith, and she talks of God's love so matter-of-factly, not in a proselytizing way at all – there's no whether-or-not about it for her. Love is the air she breathes. A certainty.

However love comes our way, it soothes. Calms the furrowed brow. Its sweetness takes us beyond our thoughts and worries, down about a foot and a half. Love coming our way awakens us here, in our heart.

The only thing as wonderful as receiving love is giving it. Now and then (rarely!) we love unconditionally. We give it away with abandon in the first delights of falling in love. Without calculation, we love a child in our midst, sometimes our own.

We can show our love in the most everyday ways. Cutting out a heart and sending it to a friend (we'll do that later) or taking time at the grocery store to chat. We love our dogs and cats, the

³ Ibid., pp 3-4.

creatures who depend on us for food and company and who, on some level, know that their fate is always safest in our hands.

Love surprises us, too, when we least expect it. Just the pure love of being alive. Seeing the pink glow of the rising moon last week. Or the bare ground at the base of a tree, where its warmth, its life force, has melted the snow. Love surprises us when a woodpecker with a red cap lands just out the window. Those moments of loving life set us free. Alive in the present, free of worry. Free of self-doubt and self-criticism. Free to feel delight.

It comes in all forms, love. Even in politics. Some of us are following the race to November closely. We listen to the news constantly. Eventually, finally, we choose our candidate. Glad for that last weekend, I was surprised to experience an unexpected moment of love, thinking, of all things, about the people running – that line of them up on the debate stage! By now I'd come to know them, learned a lot about them, watched them parry with each other, tangle with the press, perform in the debates. Not only that, but how hard every one of them has been working, living out of a suitcase, away from home, having to hit the ground running every morning and be on their game, 24/7, week after week.

To my surprise, I found myself not only feeling for them but quite loving them. Finding in each one something specific to love. This one's passion. That one's rough edges. This one's steadfastness. That one's discomfort and vulnerability. Appreciating them in this way, loving them, had a different feel than critiquing and comparing and evaluating them. A good feeling. Pleasurable too. Note to self – this is good practice.

My dad's two brothers wrote for a living. Successful creative types on Madison Avenue, they wrote ad copy many of us grew up with. They wrote on the side, too. One wrote a wickedly insightful book about how love, what he called "the brotherhood of man," trumped power and ambition in the business world. That book, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, became a hit on Broadway.

Dad's other brother wrote a song, also about love. Over the years, it became a family favorite – one of the ways we say "I love you" in my family. My dad would sing it at weddings. I sang it to him at the end of his life 20 years ago.

Just recently, driving by the wayside pulpit at the UU church in Portsmouth, I found out that the images we've sung about for years, of solitudes meeting and greeting each other in love, began not with my uncle but the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke! In the musical spirit of this morning, we close with the love song, "Two Little Solitudes."

"Two Little Solitudes"
By Walter Mead

Oh, why are we all on this little round ball
That is endlessly circling the stars,
Of minimum magnitude, lost in the multitude
Of all the billions there are?

You gaze at the sky, and you ask heaven why
Are we lost in the void and alone?
Then your head starts to reel and you suddenly feel
The soft touch of a hand on your own.

When two little solitudes meet one another
And reach out to touch and to greet one another
And shelter and share and protect one another
And tenderly spare and respect one another
Then all you can hope for on both sides of heaven is love.

It's more than the thing that the song makers sing about
More than a fling in the moonlight can bring about
More like a feeling of endless forgiving
For someone whose life makes your own worth the living!
And all you can hope for on both sides of heaven is love.

Oh it's useless, I'm told, to conserve it like gold
'Til you're old and forgotten and gray.
But to have and to hold, and increase it ten-fold,
You must constantly give it away.

And the more that you give, then the more you will own
And the less you will live feeling lost and alone.
It's the way to lay up the most lasting of treasure
By selflessly giving away your last measure.
And all you can hope for on both sides of heaven is love.