

## For God, That's No Problem at All

January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Let us pray,

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, source of love.

Chicago is the 1975 Broadway hit set in the Jazz age. The musical was choreographed by Bob Fosse, the genius who invented Jazz Hands. And if you've ever seen the musical Chicago, or watched the movie, you will have seen lots of Jazz hands. The musical is based on a [1926 play](#) written by reporter [Maurine Dallas Watkins](#), about actual criminals and crimes from that very spicy time in history. The story follows two jazzy women who are charged with murder, Roxy Hart, and Velma Kelly- and who both walk free in the end of the play.

My absolute favourite quote from Chicago is right at the end, when both women are out of jail, but their fame is dying down because they are no long in the headlines. Velma comes up with the idea of creating a singing and dancing show with Roxy so they can both find work and get back out there.

Roxy says, "It'll never work."

"Why not?" Velma asks.

"Because I hate you." says Roxy.

And Velma replies... "There's only one business where that's no problem at all. Only one business where's that's no problem at all". And so of course- their show is a hit.

In my travels as a chaplain and minister, a lot of people begin conversations with me from a place of regret, or apology. They say things like, I feel so bad I don't go to church, I did when I was a kid, but then I stopped; or I had my children baptized, but then we got too busy, so I feel bad or we moved, and never found another church; or I'm sorry, I don't go to church, but will you still talk to me? And when people begin conversations like this, I really wish I could say, "Well, this is one religion where that's no problem at all!" (Jazz hands!)

When we think about our faith, it's good to remember that the love of God is not something that can wear off- if we get distracted. It's not something that will diminish if we mess up – God's love is there for those of us who come to believe early on *and* for those who only connect or reconnect at the very last minute.

We hear about this incredible Grace in parables like Matthew's story about the workers in the vineyard where those who start work at the beginning of the day, receive the same pay as those who start just an hour before quitting time. Or Luke's story of the Prodigal Son, whose father opens his heart and home to him even after he has ruined his own life and squandered all that he had been given.

If we come late, or mess up, or get distracted; If we are anxious or confused. If we lose faith. If we are successful or if we are not successful... For God That's no problem at all.

In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

*We may be surprised at the people we find in heaven.  
God has a soft spot for sinners.  
His standards are quite low.*

The sacrament of baptism that we celebrate in our church, that Christians all over the world celebrate, and that Jesus himself shared in, is an acknowledgement, a celebration, and a sign – of God's unconditional love.

Officially- in the words of our United Church Song of Faith-  
*Baptism signifies the nurturing, sustaining,  
and transforming power of God's love  
and our grateful response to that Grace.*

We do not believe that baptism is a requirement for God's love, but a sign to us that we are loved, that our lives mean something, that we are here for a reason.

When we think about unconditional love, how the guy coming to the field at the end of the day, receives the same reward as those of us who came in the morning, we may be tempted to think that what we do doesn't matter. And while it's true that what we do does not encumber God's love for us, as believers, we are invited to receive, and to feel and to know the love of God in our lives. Receiving and accepting God's love won't change God *But might change us.*

In today's gospel, we read the beautiful story of Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan River. He is brought down under the water and back up again, When the voice of God can be heard saying, "*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*" An expression of love. This proclamation of love comes to Jesus before he performs a miracle or preaches a sermon or makes a sacrifice, not *because* he performs miracles. Love comes first. That's who God is.

In the person of Jesus, Christians believe that the love of God was fully embodied and realized. That he took the love to heart and into his Spirit – and lived it. And was one with God. And that got interesting.

You'll remember that after his baptism Jesus is driven into the wilderness to be tempted and challenged physically and spiritually. But the love and the Spirit that Jesus has received from God- allows him to rise to that challenge and to come out of that wilderness experience wiser and stronger than before. Later, Jesus will be confronted with enemies and those who do not agree with him. Jesus will interact with these enemies in the most loving way imaginable. Jesus will face violence. But the unshakable love that he embodies will allow him to respond with compassion. The spirit of love, and the ability to bring that love into a broken world, makes Jesus stronger than cruelty and abuse and sorrow and poverty. Love, gives Jesus the power and the courage to choose forgiveness and mercy, when we mortals would choose punishment and judgment.

Through the sacrament of baptism in the Christian community called the church, we believe that strength of Spirit is also available to us when we allow ourselves to receive God's love and in our own way, to embody it. We believe that trusting in that love, may give us courage to love others. That having faith in the eternity of God's love may give us hope even when our lives are coming to an end.

We believe that receiving the healing of God's love in our own lives, especially at times when we don't believe we deserve it, may open us up to be more forgiving, more patient, more gentle with others. And that through us love has the capacity to grow on earth.

This morning, whether you came to the faith as a baby, or as an adult, if you're a faithful follower and seeker of Christ, or new to the community; whether you're feeling that your life is in a complete mess-like the prodigal son wishing to come home or if you're at peace in your heart today, know that wherever you are on your journey, it is no problem at all for God to meet you there. Know that whoever you are, whatever you have done, whatever has happened to you, you are loved, and in this community, you are *called* to see what that love may bring into your life.

Amen.

Rev. Emily Carr