

Love Works  
Mental Health Sunday  
May 27, 2018  
TCC

It's exasperating when people won't behave. Because we all know how to behave and we sometimes just can't understand why others won't fall in line. They just won't. It gets our dander up. It gets our noses out of joint. It causes us to lose our peace, act in less than dignified ways, and, in some cases, worry ourselves sick. They can't seem to get it together. They make poor choices. They may drink too much, yell too much, fail to hold a job or even keep their word. We can't count on them. We love these people yet we can't stand what they do. We might be embarrassed by them. We don't acknowledge their worth or even their existence, at times. We might try limiting contact with them, yelling at them, giving them "one more chance," then we seem to run out of options. We might try what was dubbed a number of years ago "tough love." But I'm not sure we really know what tough love is. Is it kicking someone out of the house? Is it refusing to speak with someone until they behave or get clean for a certain number of days or months? Is it disowning a child?

Today is mental health Sunday. The entire month of May in the UCC is Mental Health Month. It is a time to reflect on ourselves, our loved ones and strangers in our community who suffer from mental health disorders or are addicted to drugs or alcohol or both. It is a time to ask the questions that there are no easy answers to. I certainly do not have answers today. I do have some examples of how love works. Compassion works. Even in situations when punishment or banishment or at least indignant anger seem justified and called for, is there a way that we can remain true to our mandate from Jesus to love one another? Is there a time when we can depart from that mandate, saying basically, "Listen here, enough is enough! Outta here! You're fired! Fired from life, fired from love, fired from the warming fires of hope. Is there a time when our hearts *should* turn to stone?

Or does love work, after all? See, putting our faith in love very often makes the wait longer. Choosing to love many times makes us feel out of control. Walking the Way of love makes us feel foolish at times, makes us feel as though we have been duped, conned, and seriously taken advantage of.

I was a messed up twenty-one year old. Very messed up. I suffered from crippling anxiety and depression. I was confused about my future, so confused I got married to someone just cause I didn't know what else to do. Never do that. It doesn't work. After two months of absolute chaos, heartbreak, hysteria and growing social panic, my new husband and I decided to pull a "geographic." What is a geographic? It's very well known in 12-step rooms. A geographic is when you think that if you just move somewhere else, all will be well. If you have different scenery outside your window, you'll have a different experience in your soul. Doesn't work! At the restaurant where my mother worked we stopp

ed to have breakfast on the way down to Arkansas. When my husband left to get his wallet my mom asked me, "Are you happy?" I began to cry. She told me, "Just come home." And I did. It was one of the hardest things I ever did. I came home, got into therapy, regained my strength, moved to an apartment and finished my degree. Love works.

Many years later a young man took a wrong turn. He got into a ring of friends who smoked a lot of bad stuff, stuff that contained heroin. His mother came to visit one day and found his room in such disarray she knew something was horribly wrong. She packed up his laundry, took it out to be done. 168lbs of laundry. Her son came to the car window as she was about to leave. "What's going on with you?" mom asked. The son's eyes filled with tears. "Get in," she said. The son got into the car and said nothing. "Is it heroin?" asked mom. The son nodded. With mom's encouragement the son got help. After intensive counseling, some ancillary health issues, the son got better. He was able to get off heroin and onto a different drug called Suboxone (a medication prescribed for opiate and opioid addiction). He moved home for a while at mom's invitation and withdrew from the Suboxone on his own. He got into therapy, regained his strength, finished his degree and moved to an apartment. He is now engaged to a beautiful girl. He's my son. Love works.

Jesus never condemned the sinners with whom he associated and interacted. He pointed to the problem, but never preached to them, never excluded them, never banished them, never disowned them from the circle of love and humanity which he taught and in which he walked. They felt seen and heard, included and valued. Love works.

In Huntington, VA there is a program where police and health officials go visit any person who has overdosed within 72 hours of their homecoming. They are not punishing them or shaming them or spying on them. They offer a hand of support and encouragement. They tell them they can change. They are seen and heard, included and valued. They have cut the overdose death rate by 50% just in the past year. The initiative sends out Quick Response Teams, or QRT's, who in a spirit of friendship and compassion, help individuals find detox centers, rehabs, programs of support, and jobs. The individuals who used to hate and hide from them, now greet them with hugs and gratitude. The Attorney General has been there to learn what's going on and what works. (Christian Monitor, this month) Love works.

I know a woman who has a best friend who is one of four adult children. Three of them are mentally disabled. Another friend I had in New York had three children, all of whom suffered from schizophrenia. My friend from PR had one son with schizophrenia. The other one died from an overdose. He was found in a park in Boston two years ago. You have your own stories. Our stories need to find daylight; they need to be seen and heard and woven into the prayers and fabric of our faith. You and I need to show the world, love works. No shame, no blame, just love and care and a stand for what's possible. Let's all shout, "Love works!"