

Jeff's Jottings

Love takes time

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If you're of my generation, you might recognize the words "Love Takes Time" from the 1970s pop rock band Orleans. Remember this? –

*... Love takes time
And it's hard to find
You gotta take some time
To let love grow ...*

And the importance of naming for you a nearly 40-year old, never-made-the-top-ten, mostly forgotten pop-rock song that I just happened to hear last night in my '70s loop?

Next Wednesday.

Next Wednesday, when the calendar brings culture and church together in a somewhat dizzying manner. Next Wednesday, when Valentine's Day falls on the same day as Ash Wednesday. When flowers and lavish meals and gifts of jewelry and expressions of love (deep or superficial) meet penance, repentance, fasting, and praying. When a lighthearted celebration of love meets an honest reckoning of our brokenness.

Our culture would have us choose: Valentine's Day or Ash Wednesday; the lightness of love or the somberness of ashes. It would be impossible for both to inhabit the same space.

Wouldn't it?

Unless Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday, together, become not competitors for our attention, but a truth-is-stranger-than-fiction invitation to all of us, to enter into the mystery of true love, for each other and for God, a love we know

only because God first loved us. A love defined not by those cutesy candy hearts or expensive glitter on one particular day, but by an ongoing commitment to finding one's deepest expressions of ourselves, as real and honest and other-oriented as we can discover. And not just for one day, but for a lifetime.

We hear the word love so often these days that it almost doesn't mean anything anymore. We know the words and phrases of love by heart, but scarcely let the words speak to our heart, and more pointedly, to our actions.

Maybe this odd confluence of culture and faith will be what it looks like it will be, a collision of competing values. But could it also be just enough to remind us not to take love so much for granted; and in doing so, to more intentionally live our sometimes too-easy expressions for what God really intends our love to be, and do, and mean.

You really do have to take some time to let that kind of love grow. As we step into the 40-day journey of Lent through the unlikely lens of Valentine's Day, may we do so carrying with us the certainty of God's love and presence.