



**CWR**<sub>m</sub>  
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## Pastoral Perspective

### Love or Syrupy Sentimentalism?

**QUESTION:** *Isn't your emphasis on "love" really just syrupy sentimentalism?* The whole "Love Wins" thing sounds great, but in the real world, I don't see it working.

**RESPONSE:** To reduce love to syrupy sentimentalism, as I suppose many do, drains love of its gritty power.

When I say that love is *gritty*, I'm talking about the type of resilience it takes to engage this hard world, so corrupted by injustice and cruelty.

When systems of oppression grind away at our humanity, it is normal—even healthy and necessary—to feel hurt, anger and outrage at the evils that people commit. But as the apostle James once said, "the wrath of man cannot generate the justice God wants" (James 1:20 my translation).

Nor would a so-called "love" that is saccharine sweet. The type of love that overcomes evil with good requires true grit—a fire in one's bones that you see in the prophet Jeremiah (20:9).

While Jeremiah is often referred to as "the weeping prophet," his tears were not merely his own. He was weeping the tears of God, grieving for the great R-rated tragedies of Jerusalem that make 2020 look like a carnival in comparison.

Those tears represent the way that gritty love becomes agitated and then agitates. For love is not passive and silent when God's precious children experience affliction... or when they inflict it. Real love is bothered when people are mean. Real love doesn't turn a blind eye or bite its tongue. Real love is agitated when anyone is belittled or excluded or trampled down. Real love both cries and it cries out. And that's when love agitates.

Jeremiah agitated against child sacrifice, against the corrupt temple, against oppression of the poor and against workplace inequity—and he was just warming up.

But for all the prophet Jerry's agitation and agitating, don't forget that what drove his message was divine love for real people locked in disparate situations. He wasn't a self-congratulating ally of the "great a-woke-ning," deluding himself that "doing justice" amounted to posting clever memes.

His love had the kind of persistent grit that keeps asking inconvenient questions and risks being "unfriended"... but also keeps showing up to do the unglamorous works of love and justice, year after year.

So we ask, was it syrupy sentimentalism that got Jeremiah incarcerated at the bottom of a well? Was Isaiah's message a saccharine spirituality that led to his body being sawn in two? Was it a pasty passive love that ultimately got Jesus crucified?

Not on your life. Literally. The gritty love of the prophets, the apostles and the Lord seemed to have a consistent outcome: martyrdom.

That said, that brand of resilient love was anything but powerless.

Sure, to the untrained eye, our heroes of the faith looked like their love was in vain, defeated and debunked. But the testimony of those martyrs was, "We multiply when you reap us. The blood of Christ-followers is seed." That is, trying to snuff out authentic Christian love is as ineffectual as trying to kill dandelions by blowing on their ripe heads.

Why was that? Because what could not be snuffed out, what endured over millennia, was always the courageous love that led each of these faithful witnesses to forgive the unforgivable, to release their oppressors from condemnation, and to radiate the cross-shaped kindness of God that withers cruelty and overcomes enemies by making them friends through the inexplicable embrace of Christ-in-us. In many cases, opponents miraculously began to feel Someone loving them from the inside and they could not turn away.

So, syrupy sentimentalism? Not on your life. □

**Love is not syrupy.  
It is gritty and powerful.**