**Reflection for Monday, February 6, 2023**



One of the great pleasures of my grade school years was of preparing a discarded shoebox for Valentine’s Day. Each year, every kid in my class would decorate a box so we could bring it in for the exchange of Valentines. Each year, I carefully cut a little mail slot into the lid of the shoebox, so that it was ready to receive valentine mail. I remember with special fondness those valentines that had a candy conversation heart stuck on with a piece of scotch tape. It’s a little horrifying now to think about how eagerly I peeled off the blotchy tape to eat the candy, but I’ve survived to adulthood, so it’s all good.



Then there was the great pleasure of making valentine cards or buying a package of them at the grocery store. If we were lucky, my mother would also get us stickers to put on ours. Hearts, sparkly stars, smoochy lips. And, yes, I would add extra embellishments to my best friend Anne Clare’s valentine, and write an anonymous mash note to whatever boy I was crushing on (“I like you.” How risqué!).



Still, there was a beautiful democracy to the valentine tradition. Our teachers always emphasized that we bring valentines to share with *every* student in the class. Yep, Jackie M. who deliberately tripped me on the blacktop. Johnny D. who gleefully taught us swear words on the way home from school. Kelly B. who quietly helped me with math when I was too embarrassed to raise my hand with questions. Every single one got a valentine. Meanwhile, my shoebox, glued with pink and red construction paper hearts, overflowed with “I choo-choo-choose you” train valentines and ornate tea cups proclaiming, “You’re my cup of tea!”—one from each of my classmates.



What seemed like an innocent, perhaps silly, tradition actually resonates well with something as weighty as Jesus’s words in the Gospel of Matthew. I paraphrase:

Love even the folks you don’t particularly like and pray for those who give you a hard time, so that you will be true children of God. After all, God makes the sun rise on the naughty and on the nice, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.For if you love only those who love you, what reward do you have?

Here’s an invitation to enjoy the great universal presence of God’s love—with a little chocolate too, if you like—and to remember that we are all worthy recipients of both human and divine affection.

In faith,

Elizabeth