
Letters to a Young Episcopalian: St. Valentine

This letter is part of a series of fictional letters by Canon George Maxwell intended for Episcopalians young and old who wonder what it means to be faithful in the world today.

Last Week's Letter: [Vocation](#)

[Back to All Letters](#)

Next Week's Letter: [Lent](#)

Dear Anna,

I found an old Valentine from you yesterday.

I think the first letter I ever wrote you was in response to that card. You were too young to sign it, but I knew it was from you. It has your tiny handprints arranged to make the shape of a heart.

Do you remember it?

Finding that card made me think about St. Valentine. I wonder if you know his story?

Valentine was a doctor in ancient Rome. He often bartered for his services since there were many people who needed his help but could not pay him.

One day, an old man came in with his daughter hoping that Valentine could restore her sight. Valentine used a cold compress to make her eyes feel better, and began to teach her about the things that she couldn't see.

He often took her with him to gather the herbs that he used in his practice, and they became good friends. She loved to pick the first blooms of spring and take them home to her father.

Valentine was also a priest, but Christianity was still illegal in Rome then. He prayed for his patients every night, always behind closed doors.

Somehow, he was discovered and arrested. The little girl's father was in charge of the jail, and as the soldiers were taking Valentine out to be executed, Valentine gave the jailer a rolled up piece of paper with instructions to give it to his daughter.

When they unrolled the note, a crocus fell out onto the floor. The note said, "From your Valentine."

We often associate Valentine's Day cards with romantic feelings, probably because the day we remember Valentine's death coincided with the ancient Roman feast of Lupercalia, a time when young women wrote love notes to their suitors.

Valentine himself, though, calls us to a courageousness in love that transcends greeting card sentiments. Of course, Valentine risked his life for his faith. But he also showed courage in his commitment, even to his last act, to doing the little things that let people know they were loved.

As the poet David Whyte says, "On the inside we come to know who and what and how we love and what we can do to

deepen that love; only from the outside and only by looking back, does it look like courage.”

Happy Valentine’s Day!

Your affectionate uncle,
Ames

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