

“You must remember this, a kiss is just a kiss, a sigh is just a sigh. The fundamental things apply as time goes by. These familiar words, from the song made famous in the movie ‘Casablanca,’ spoke to me the other day as I was working on a historical review of our United Methodist Homes. We are, in fact, using the song as a backdrop for telling our story. When playing with the words, making them fit our needs for the event, I suddenly realized how apropos these original words are for our setting, even if they were not written as such.

“A kiss is still a kiss!” I dropped the word ‘just’ and replaced it with ‘still’. For I recognized how easy it is for us to forget that aging does not mean the end to a person’s need for feeling loved, for feeling special, to sense that someone finds him or her warranting a “kiss.” A “kiss,” a physical statement that says, “I love you,” is never just a kiss. A ‘kiss,’ a ‘touch,’ still gives credence to the words we say and speak louder than any words we might speak. As we age, the intense passion of our younger years may diminish, but the need to be touched, the need to be specifically noticed and special to someone does not. This is increasingly true “as time goes by,” and our activities become more limited and our circle of family and friends grows smaller.

It is too easy for caregivers, pastor, lay visitors, and other family members and friends to pay so much attention to the physical needs of those for whom we care that we forget to pay attention to their emotional and spiritual needs. It is too easy to get bogged down in the routine, but necessary, day-to-day tasks of caring, that we forget the absolutely necessary ingredient of a healing ministry – love that is sometimes spoken, but always shown.

I am struck by the intimacy Jesus showed to the disciples and other followers, by the number of references to Jesus touching those he healed, or by allowing those who needed healing to touch him. There is physicality inherent in our statement of faith that tells us Jesus is God incarnate, God in the flesh! It seems we are most effective in ministering to anyone, specifically in this instance to older adults, when we find acceptable means to touch, to hug, to kiss those to whom we minister. I remember Phoebe, a member of my very first congregation, who I, one day as a visit ended, hugged and kissed on the forehead. She said, “I’ll cherish that hug and kiss for a long time. That is the first time since my husband died that anyone has done that.” How sad! And how enlightening! If we are to offer a ministry of healing, it has to involve acceptable ways of touching. Saying “I love you” does not speak as loudly or eloquently as a touch or a kiss. Yes, “A kiss is still a kiss, as time goes by.”

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