

20th February 2021

Token

“Send me some tokens ...”

John Donne, The Token

John Donne was a leading metaphysical poet in the Renaissance of 17th century England. An adventurer, writer, politician and theologian, Donne was a fascinating mixture of the down-to-earth and the romantic. In an eventful life, he had to cope with good fortune and bad – on the one hand, being a member of parliament and a high-ranking civil servant during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and James IV & I, and, on the other, an impoverished father struggling to support a growing family. In time, he became a cleric in the Church of England, and, under royal patronage, was Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral from 1621 till his death in 1631.

His poetry, known only to a few friends during his lifetime, is intensely personal, and no more so than when his thoughts turn to the expressions of love. His poem *The Token*, written in 1672, offers us this:

*Send me some token, that my hope may live,
Or that my easeless thoughts may sleep and rest;
Send me some honey to make sweet my hive,
That in my passions I may hope the best.*

Love, of course, is a mysterious thing, which doesn’t always give itself to definition or explanation. That’s why tokens of love matter, for they are tangible, expressing what words cannot or will not convey. But then, as he reflects on this, Donne concludes that no mere token could ever say it all.

*I beg no riband wrought with thine own hands,
To knit our loves in the fantastic strain
Of new-touched youth; nor ring to show the stands
Of our affection, that as that's round and plain,
Send me nor this, nor that, to increase my store,
But swear thou think'st 'I love thee,' and no more.*

What, then, might be a token of love you give someone today? A gift, a letter, a card? A ring, perhaps? But don’t ever let a mere token be enough, when love refuses to be confined in all its mystery and glory.

A prayer for today

*If the token of your love is the gift of your Son,
will my tokens of love to others express what your love means? Amen*

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