



## A TRIBUTE TO LOVE

The news of Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon's death came by way of a Union colleague's text that afternoon, when my heart—in the same moment—bruised with sadness and swelled with gratitude. I wept and talked aloud to my beloved teacher.

Dr. Cannon, thank you.  
Thank you for loving me.  
Thank you for your strong, kind love.  
Thank you teaching me,  
showing me how to teach:  
how to love.

It's love.  
Love is what remains.  
Love is what endures.  
It's love.

It was my first doctoral seminar in Dr. Cannon's classroom on the second floor of Watts Hall where I found my voice. The agency and substance of my voice. Dr. Cannon amplified it by adding hers to mine then fading away until one day I heard the fullness of my solo sound, at times with boom boom, surprising myself at the cadence and rhythm of my own truths. We read aloud—announced, she would say—our long and boring papers to one another. The four of us and our Professor around the pentagon shaped seating, I can still hear the rustle of autumn leaves within an arms reach outside the open window. She listened. She listened as if we were scholars. She regarded our sentences, the baby ideas still incubating in them, with concise curiosity and engaged them with a depth of intellectual inquiry that we knew the caliber of our papers did not merit. Soon, we were writing as if we were scholars. And, indeed, we were on our way to our own paths of scholarship, teaching, ministry, and life. There was magic in her pedagogy.

Dr. Cannon served on my dissertation committee. She held me fiercely accountable to voice, to identity, to context in the academic exercise. No place to hide behind the safety of abstractions. I could not afford it. It was a matter of historical survival of the particular self, of the community—legitimation of the experience of being human in the ebb of a violently lopsided structure. I learned from this praxis that what is intensely personal is intensely political. I wrote in my acknowledgments: She is the kind of teacher-woman-scholar I want to emulate. And in the

years since, in every classroom, behind every lectern and pulpit, I have made my earnest attempt. I wanted to mimic her brilliant critical analyses, her embodied theological vision, her bold dance of redemption, her impatient blinking in the presence of pretension. But these belonged only to her. She is a Womanist, and I am not. I realize that what I was ultimately emulating was her radical generosity, genuine curiosity, deliberate attention: her love. There was poetry in her majestic, humble way.

Our first child was born in the second year of my PhD program at Union. The librarian assigned me a large corner carrel in Morton Library saying there is plenty of space for a bassinet. To this day, we call Kate: Richmond Baby. There is a photo of Dr. Cannon holding Kate on the Quad. It is poignant that this week, Kate returned from a pre-college program where she took a course on feminist theory and intersectionality. When I visited Dr. Cannon several years ago, I saw every Christmas photo card I sent each year of the family. Kate, along with her two siblings were scattered among her books on the shelves. I like to imagine that the density and buoyancy of those words, announcements of resistance, struggle, and hope, surround the children I am privileged to raise. There was mother-bear warmth to her edgy, erudite mind.

Dr. Cannon was a sage and mentor for so many of us. It seems selfish to keep to myself her wisdom that nurtured me in my personal and professional journey. Just like her, the guidance she provided was equally prophetic, equally practical. I share a small collection of what I learned from Dr. Cannon by what she said, what I observed. I remember and live into each of these as I fashion my vocation with love. I'm sure others can stretch this list much longer. In no particular order:

Prepare. Always prepare. Go prepared. You must be doubly prepared, for you are required to be expert of the truth occupying the structural center and expert of your own truth: "Read even when the lights are out."

Listen. Listen attentively. But don't listen for too long. Speak. Interrupt. Announce!

Don't be stingy with time for people, for conversation, for relationship.

Don't be stingy with affirmation and encouragement.

Read students' papers. Yes, actually read them. No scanning allowed.

Never be lazy with writing recommendation letters.

Don't stay in my chair when someone comes into my office. Always come around the desk and sit side by side with my guest.

It is imperative that academics have a creative outlet. Make, create, and publish that too! Many will know of Dr. Cannon's signature glorious amoeba prints made into postcards each year.

"People's rejection is God's protection."

It is possible to be simultaneously an astute theologian, a church woman, a lover. All with integrity.

Strategize, collaborate with fellow humans.

Kin-dom.

Walk with dignified stride everywhere.

Read Zora Neale-Hurston!

And I say, Read *Katie's Canon*! (especially, Appendix: Exposing My Home Point of View)

In our last e-mail correspondence, Dr. Cannon showed me again her magical pedagogy, poetic humility, and mother-bear affection: "Let's continue dialoguing until you are crystal clear about your next move."

I will continue dialoguing with my beloved teacher.

It's love.

Love is what remains.

Love is what endures.

It's love!

Truly Yours,  
Charlene Jin Lee

8 August 2018  
Pasadena, Calif.