

“You shall love the Lord, your God.... You shall love your neighbor...”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, there was a wonderful movie called, **“Little Lord Fauntleroy.”** It was about a seven-year-old boy, who went to live with his grandfather, a wealthy man, with many people in his employment.

The old man was, basically, selfish and mean. **BUT**...there’s that proverbial **BUT** already, the little boy idolized his grandfather so much, he saw **none** of this. He thought his grandfather was hugely kind and generous. Repeatedly, he would say to him:

“Oh, grandfather! How people must love you! I’ll bet they love you almost as much as I do.”

To make a long story short, the little boy’s love gradually softens the old man’s heart and he actually becomes the kind of person the little boy thinks him to be.

I share this story with you because it’s like a parable about Jesus. It shows how his love for us can change **us** and give **us** the power to become the kind of loving person he sees we can be. This may seem a bit of a ‘stretch,’ **BUT**...bear with me.

When we step back and look at Jesus, we all know that **love is at the core of his being**. We see it in all of his teachings. We see it in all of his deeds. Nothing he said or did is more expressive of his love ...than his crucifixion..., which he freely accepted, even though he was terrified of it, as he clearly expressed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

“What makes the crucifixion such an eloquent testimony of our Lord’s love?”—you ask.

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

I will now show you three distinct aspects to that act (of crucifixion), which can help us become that **‘wonderful goodness’** he sees in us, just as Fauntleroy saw goodness in his grandfather.

1st, the crucifixion is a **‘sign’ of** love—of Jesus’ great love for us. He said:

“The greatest love a person can have for his friends is... to give his life for them.” Jn.15:13

Personally, I am very glad Jesus gave us that great sign. We need to realize that we **are** lovable. For if we don’t love ourselves, we really can’t love others. You see, **love is the gift of self**. **BUT**, if we don’t see ourselves as lovable—and therefore valuable, we won’t give ourselves to another **from our core**. For, no one gives junk or garbage to one about whom they care very deeply!

In the final analysis, we are **so** lovable and **so** valuable... that Jesus gave his own life for us!

2nd, the crucifixion is an **‘invitation’ to** love. It says **visually** what Jesus so often said **verbally**:

“Love one another as I have loved you.” Jn. 15:12

Again, I am very glad Jesus gave us that invitation. For it tells us that Jesus considers our love to be valuable. He teaches us we **can** help others by our love, just as he helped us by **his** love.

Teachers will tell you that a student’s self-esteem takes a giant leap forward when they discover that their kindness, actually their love, is valuable. When a student gets involved in a service project e.g.,—tutoring younger students, reading to the blind, visiting the elderly, they discover, often for the first time, that they have value—that they **can** help others. So, the crucifixion invites us to love others as Jesus has loved us. And we discover that we **can** help others by **loving** them.

3rd, the crucifixion is a **‘revelation’ about** love. It supplies us with one of the most important lessons in all of life: **love entails suffering**! I am especially glad that Jesus demonstrated that to us in a most dramatic way. It counters the lie that is often perpetuated on TV, namely, that saving people can most often be done without any great, personal cost.

For example, the TV doctor heals the sick without suffering himself.

For example, the TV lawyer protects the exploited without getting hurt himself.

For example, The TV police officer saves the brutalized child without being brutalized himself.

The shining armor of such TV-heroes is only dirtied; it's rarely dented or damaged.

*Jesus shows us how unreal this picture is. He shows us that loving people and saving them entails **real** suffering.*

For example, it's painful when a loved one shouts at us or... slams the door on us.

For example, it's painful to be **forgiving**—like the **father** of the prodigal son, and welcome home a wayward son/daughter.

For example, it's painful to **BE** the humble son/daughter and admit that we were so **very** wrong.

*And here's another thing while I am at it: I think that, just as certain products must be labeled with, **"This product may be harmful to your health,"** so too, all marriage licenses should be stamped with, **"Caution, love entails suffering!"***

*I will now try to supply an explanation of **why** ...all the pain.*

Arthur Godfrey understood it. He had a sign on his office wall that said:

"The fire, Lord, not the scrap heap."

To explain that sign...

Once upon a time, there was a blacksmith, who suffered much illness, but always maintained a strong faith in God. When an unbeliever asked the blacksmith how he could keep trusting God in spite of his horrible illness, he replied:

**"When I make a tool, I take a piece of iron and put it into the fire.
Then I strike it on the anvil to see if it can take temper.
If it does, I can make a useful article out of it.
If not, I toss it on the scrap heap."**

Hence: **"The fire, Lord, not the scrap heap."**

*I think our love is a lot **like** that ...the suffering involved is like the fire & anvil on a piece of iron. It makes us strong. It gives us a temperament that can endure in good times **and** in bad. It gives us strength to withstand the storms of life. It gives us the ability to **"BE THERE"** for the ones we love...no matter what! It enables us to identify with Christ-crucified, who suffered so hugely in his love for us.*

To summarize:

**The crucifixion of Jesus is a sign of love--that Jesus loves us.
...an invitation to love --others—as he has loved us.
...a revelation about love--that love entails suffering.**
(If it doesn't hurt, then it's, probably, only wonderful, fleeting, 'puppy love!')

I close with this prayer:

**Lord... teach us to love you, as you deserve;
teach us to love others, as you love us;
teach us to love others, even when it hurts.**
**For it is in loving... that we acknowledge you.
It is in loving... that we give happiness to others.
And it is in loving... that we find meaning in our lives.**

*May our all-loving God, our dear Abba, bless you...
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*