

“Maundy Thursday Reflection”

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Love is one of the most elusive words of the English language. It is hard to formulate a good definition. But we know it when we see it. That’s why when speaking of love it’s better to tell a story.

William Gladstone, in announcing the death of Princess Alice to the House of Commons, told a touching story. The little daughter of the Princess was seriously ill with diphtheria. The doctors told the princess not to kiss her little daughter and endanger her life by breathing the child’s breath. Once when the child was struggling to breathe, the mother, forgetting herself entirely, took the little one into her arms to keep her from choking to death. Rasping and struggling for her life, the child said, “Momma, kiss me!” Without thinking of herself the mother tenderly kissed her daughter. She got diphtheria and some days thereafter she died.

That’s love. She forgot herself entirely for the sake of loving her child. It’s not that she carefully weighed the consequences, consulted several friends, brought it to a committee, before deciding that the best thing to do was to respond to her daughter’s request for a kiss that would certainly cause her own death. She just loved her daughter. It’s not really a function of the brain. It comes from a place in the heart. It’s a reflex of the heart.

When I was a kid and I would go to the doctor for a check up, he would always test my reflexes by striking the spot just below my knee with his little hammer. Having seen this procedure in cartoons or the 3 stooges, I would kind of imitate the response by intentionally giving a little kick. I would never let it happen naturally. I suppose I was a little afraid that my natural reflexes wouldn’t perform, as they should. What if my reflexes were broken??

God created us with a natural reflex to love. However, from the very beginning going back to Adam and Eve, sin began to get in the way with this innate response to people: to love. Instead, the human race began to react with hate, selfishness, and indifference. Me first.

We see this in the world and in our own lives all the time. Rather than responding to each other with love, we react to each other with everything but love. We forgot how to do the most natural thing in the world: love.

Jesus came to teach us how to love. The whole story of the gospel is a story about love. The Gospel of John has the word love 38 times. It is a story about what love truly is. It’s a master washing the feet of his servant, making him his brother. It’s a God who

became vulnerable and mortal, in order to love his creation with his own hands. I don't think God had to think about it. I don't think he measured the consequences. Surely he knew them, but all this God heard was his dying child crying out "Mamma, kiss me!" and he responded and he died.