

LOVE



Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no account of wrongs....

1 Corinthians 4: 3-5

WITHOUT LOVE--

Miss Mary's Story

John 13: 34-35

“A new command I give you:

Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

As the seasons of our lives have arrived and departed on time, adorned with their usual colors and textures, it is easy to allow the words to the Scripture about loving one another to become so familiar that, although cherished as a favorite, the meaning and difficulty of application have become lost somewhere in the recesses of our minds. Thus, rather than spending time on contemplating their true meaning, and acting on it as a commandment in our lives, we simply skim over it as something timeless and sweet to quote.

However, if we allow the words from our Lord to sink deeply into the very fiber of our being, the sweetness suddenly changes to an unfamiliar, and perhaps, foreign taste; one like we have never experienced; prompting a moment of reflection that is the most challenging of the time we have been on earth because of being required to answer the hard questions, “Do I really love others the way Jesus has commanded? Or... have I built a comfortable fence around my belief in Christ by using the scriptures from the Bible as an old familiar blanket that protects me from the outside world that is filled to the brim with chaos and hardship? Do I pick and choose the scriptures that only support my point of view? After all, recognizing this would require change, followed by action. And.... it just might cause my faith in God to be threatened. So, better keep things status quo and do what I have always been taught. And... life goes on as usual.”

Certainly, as Christians, we believe that, out of love, God came to dwell among us as Jesus our Messiah and died as a sacrifice for our sin; a gift that is totally free if we truly believe and repent. Furthermore, that same opportunity of receiving grace is extended to all without exception; meaning every human being inhabiting the planet God so miraculously created.

However, the writer believes this is only the beginning of our walk with the Lord. What follows is realizing the requirements as set forth by our Savior. In other words, what is necessary to be a citizen in the kingdom of God as specified by Jesus when he walked on this earth as the Son of Man?

Folks, the difficulties and responsibilities Christ's followers face on this earthly journey were described in detail by him as he delivered the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew, Chapters 5, 6, 7) using sentences like, "The meek shall inherit the earth." What? Not the rich and powerful? Oh dear! That upsets society's rules, doesn't it?

Furthermore, go to the parables, the short stories Jesus told in the Bible, and view them according to their purpose and structure. Allow yourself to dig deeply in a time of exploration even if it means an enormous amount of squirming and thinking because of having more questions than answers. A barometer for you to use for determining whether you have allowed the parable to hit the mark is to evaluate the closure experienced. In your mind, did it suggest that you need to go beyond the accepted and usual understanding as taught by your elders or family members? In other words, are you uncomfortable and possibly even troubled? Have you been made so uneasy that extended contemplation is required; meaning, are your thoughts filled with questions as to how you are conducting yourself in the world you call home? Example: In the story of the Good Samaritan, have you placed yourself in the role of the victim, and asked "if" someone you consider as your enemy happened to be the individual that was depicted in the story as having saved YOU, in all reality, would YOU allow him/her to assist YOU? How high, deep, and wide is this wall of prejudice in your heart? Are you squirming yet? Are you clinging to the former understanding of that parable as ingrained in you by society and religious teachings? Are you asking if Jesus really meant for people that are kingdom citizens to be of the right attitude toward others in his creation; even though the individual saving you might be a refugee, former criminal, or covered in a different skin color; and...above all, be from the wrong tribe?

In order to answer this question, the following scripture from Deuteronomy 10:18 (one of the books of the Torah that Jesus as a Jew followed) will get you started on your journey: **"He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing."**

Ladies and gentlemen, at this point, you are probably asking what this has to do with a special friend lovingly called by the writer as "Miss Mary". In reply, this writer will tell you that it means absolutely everything! Prior to writing her story titled, "Without Love, You're Just A Ball in High Grass", having spent hours recording her journey of life and inner most feelings, being of the right attitude was critical for both parties in the project. Unless we wore one another's sandals, our time together would lack understanding, compassion, and be filled with only empty platitudes. Thus, if the words were to truly take on meaning, then love and trust would be the critical components in allowing our hearts to beat as one.

Thus, when either of us felt pain or suffering, it would be immediately recognized by the other simply through the act of searching body language; behavior that would become a habit out of learning to love deeply. Suddenly, the pain and anguish the other one felt would truly become personal and immediately claimed; thus, penetrating to the very core of the being.

Dear readers, although you have already immensely enjoyed Miss Mary's story titled, "Without Love You're Just A Ball In High Grass," found on www.devotionalembbers.com, what will now unfold is the final chapter of her life; the last moments of her earthly walk; a precious time when you will discover how a kingdom member crossed the Jordan and entered the eternal city of God displaying courage, faith, and assurance.

In addition, it is critical for you to know the words the writer penned below were written from a first-hand account of Miss Mary's departure. Her guardian and the writer had the wonderful honor of being at her side every step of the way; a time when it felt as if the setting sun was signaling that the precious moments spent with her were quickly being relabeled as yesterday, yet, as bittersweet as this message felt to us, simultaneously arriving in our hearts was the awareness that this sweet, kind, child of God was becoming transformed into a new-born, containing the seeds of life, fully alive within her, for all eternity.

Prelude to Miss Mary's Story

Before Miss Mary's story unfolds, it is important to set the stage as to the chasm society had already established between two unlikely friends because of the great divide mankind had created due to the ugly monster called segregation; a situation brought on through the narrow mindedness as applied to color of skin determining the worth of a person. In Mary's words, she always proudly proclaimed herself as being an "IBW"; meaning Indian, Black, and White regarding race.

Since the writer, on the other hand, had really never thought about, or been exposed to such, she simply regarded herself as a country girl, preacher's kid, and a member of a small rural community that still had its own class system; one that you either escaped or learned to navigate throughout your earthly journey. In this environment, the definition of segregation simply was applied according to the unwritten rules of a different nature. First, preachers' kids were labeled as PKs, and those having to ride the big yellow school buses were considered below the "townies"; a system of classification that was understood and followed without exception or discussion.

Given this, isn't it fascinating that with backgrounds as just described, through the hand of our marvelous God, a perfect storm for a unique, solid, friendship was included as a part of his master plan?

Consequently, sitting at the feet of the wise and wonderful lady loving called, "Miss Mary" would, not only be a learning process for both, but also serve as a time of enlightenment; one that would expand our understanding of the rough and rugged road of the downtrodden in this

world; governances established by the minds of mere man out of a desire to control others through insecurities or prejudices of their own.

On one hand, having always been thrust into the role of a survivor since birth, the writer's, soon to be dear friend, would learn that some folks are colorblind and willing to extend love and kindness; a process that was foreign to an individual that had always been branded, as well as thrust into the role of a "GIVER". While, simultaneously, the writer being a person that had never been exposed to the pain and suffering based on skin color, would not only gain a new perspective, but one that would penetrate to the very core of the soul when identifying the pain and suffering inflicted on a member of God's creation.

Thus, through the marvelous guidance of the Spirit, at the conclusion of the time spent in communion, two children of God developed such a unique relationship, it served as a model that is now available for a worldwide audience to use as a tool for reaching out to others.

And... now, dear reader, let us begin.

Miss Mary's Story

Even after hearing the powerful alto voice belonging to Miss Mary winding its way down the corridor at Glendale Gardens Nursing home communicating to God in an incredibly tender and intimate prayer, it was truly a surprise to later discover that the individual delivering these words, then in her late 80s, had lost both parents at age three and was left without a place to call home. Given this auspicious launch, how was it humanly possible for an individual to deliver such a magnanimous prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord?

Yet, that is exactly how Miss Mary's life began due to no one wanting to take care of such a young child. Although her older sister and two brothers had been taken in by others and quickly departed, no comforting arms had scooped this little tike up in a display of love and compassion. Instead, she was left with a stand-in until authorities could decide her fate.

However, when mere humans are unable to step up to the plate and go the extra mile, the Great Creator has already swung into action in a way that is unique and bizarrely magnificent. Thus, one weekend, as the landlady of the dwelling that Miss Mary's family had just vacated, was visiting friends in St. Louis, the Holy Spirit spoke to her in a way that was so powerful it literally propelled her into immediate action. After hearing the commanding voice of the Holy Spirit say, "Go back and get your baby girl", she resolutely drove her car to the city of Springfield like a maniac. Then, upon arrival, she sought out the three-year-old little girl she recalled so vividly, addressed her with open arms exclaiming, "Come to your mama"; an invitation that was as binding as the covenant between God and Abraham in the Old Testament.

Therefore, instead of the dark cloud that had formed above Miss Mary's head increasing in intensity, the winds of change swept away the gloom, allowing the sunshine of hope to light the path toward a bright tomorrow; one that would provide an atmosphere for a broken heart to be healed and filled with an unending love for her fellowman that would last a life time.

Folks, this is a wonderful example that the composition of a family may not necessarily be biological; but instead resemble that of the disciples Jesus called to follow him; a group possessing an array of personalities filled with love for their Lord.

Thus, from this point in Miss Mary's life, forward, one of the principles her new mother immediately engrained was to respect all God's children; regardless of race or color. In fact, it was well known by everyone, that the welcome mat at the front door where Miss Mary resided was extended to people from all walks of life, without question. There was always extra food prepared at every meal just for this purpose. Thus, Miss Mary recalled fondly the array of faces that graced their dining room table, and especially at holiday time. Additionally, it was a deeply conditioned principle that if a lack of respect was ever shown to one of God's children by anyone in attendance, including a young Miss Mary, an automatic reprimand would be the result.

Ladies and gentlemen, the incredible thing about the teaching above was the fact that this was the basic foundation established in Miss Mary's life at a time when segregation was alive and well in society; with rules and regulations so strong that she had to attend a school for people of her color, be limited to playing in one park, allowed to only sit in the balcony at one theater out of sight, and not be given the opportunity of becoming a physician even though she was valedictorian of her class. Folks, when listening to the examples of pain and suffering inflicted by society on my dear friend as she walked the path of her earthly journey, the tears of sorrow flowed uncontrollably down the writer's face. You see, even though she was in her 80s at the time of this conversation, to observe her watery eyes as a result of the sorrow that still overpowered her because of the cruelty she had endured, caused the writer to intensely wear her suffering.

However, if you think for an instant that Miss Mary wallowed in her misery, my friend, you will be totally left behind. After taking just a moment to regain her composure, a smile unfolded that encompassed her entire face as she recounted the following story describing an incident that demonstrated how she handled the ignorance of society regarding prejudice due to skin color.

Thus, the following poignant example that shows how much she had internalized her adoptive mother's teachings transpired after she had married and opened her own BQ restaurant. After having used what, she labeled as her inborn taste bud to create mouthwatering recipes, she had a gentleman with snow white skin to sheepishly enter her establishment one day and carefully ask, "Do you serve people of my skin color?" Thus, answering without hesitation, Miss Mary being Miss Mary, wasted no time by replying, "I'll tell you what! Why don't you put a paper bag over your head and touch the skin on your arm and then mine to see if there is any difference in feel. Of course, you foolish man, sit yourself down!"

Then later, after the book launch, "Without Love, You're Just A Ball in High Grass", Miss Mary and the writer were invited by the NAACP as special guests for the purpose of presenting to

her the “Woman of Honor Award”; a wonderful surprise having been organized without her knowledge. Thus, upon arrival to the banquet room that was filled with many African American faces, Miss Mary asked the writer to kneel in front of her wheelchair for the soul purpose of pointing her long finger right at the writer’s nose while asking, “Do you feel out of place because of the color of your pale skin?” (All the while wearing a mischievous grin) However, having learned from the best teacher sitting right in front of her, the writer fired right back, “Why don’t you put a bag over your head and touch your skin and then mine and see if there is any difference in feel.” Then, just seconds later, while in a fit of laughter, she loudly proclaimed, “ALL RIGHT, GIRL!”

Additionally, to substantiate the point that she lived her life “loving her neighbor as herself”, all you had to do was to enjoy the photographs of the children’s faces that papered the walls of her nursing home room to note they came from an array of nationalities. Folks, these little children had such an enormous place in Miss Mary’s heart that taking guests on a tour of her wall and recounting the stories of each literally caused her to glow from head to foot. In fact, she helped so many children that a day was named for her by the Boys and Girls Club; a time of great celebration.

Later, dear readers, even after she moved to the nursing home and had limited use of her body, she still would roll that wheelchair up and down the hallway using the only hand that worked, going in and out of rooms offering encouragement to both residents and staff members alike; all because she loved her neighbor as herself.

Finally, when her health began to quickly fail; creating a situation that required hospital care, even in a state of severe physical decline, she prompted laughter from everyone she met; regardless of age or gender; all because the river of love that ran from her soul never went dry.

Thus, given her sharp decline when one evening the writer’s phone rang with the voice on the other end announcing the grave state of health Miss Mary was in, it was obvious the sun was now setting on a life well lived; one that, although far from perfect, had been an example of how people are supposed to behave as members residing in God’s kingdom.

Therefore, as the writer and guardian kept a close bedside vigil offering comfort by singing hymns, stroking the crown of her head, and repeating old familiar Bible verses, what unfolded was beyond description. You see, Miss Mary had touched so many lives, that as news spread throughout the community of her impending death, great numbers of people from all races and colors began to gather just outside her door, quietly waiting to say their own goodbye to this special lady that had continuously been there at just the right time. First, staff members entered, delivering hugs, kisses, and expressions of thanks for providing courage to face the hardships that were too challenging to bear alone. Some would kneel, place their head sweetly on her chest and state, “Because of you, I can now make it.”

Then, after the wave of staff members had departed, people from the surrounding community proceeded to form a line that went from her bed all the way down the corridor waiting quietly

to say farewell. Ladies and gentlemen, this went on all day, and lasted until 10:30 pm; the final to arrive being the owner of the restaurant she had built from scratch as a newly married lady. Entering the room with his Bible in hand and smelling of smoky barbeque, it seemed to offer an appropriate ending that, although unplanned, closed the curtain with grace and dignity on a special child of God's life.

Finally, as the lights in her room dimmed, signaling the approaching night, the writer placed her hands on both sides of Miss Mary's face and softly spoke the following words, "All your friends have departed, my dear lady, you can now fly away home." And... that is exactly what transpired. Within a very short period of time, her spirit left her body and soared toward her heavenly home; thus, having crossed the mighty Jordan, the celestial city that she frequently described came into view.

Later, it was an honor for the writer to be welcomed among those that had gathered to celebrate a life well lived; one that still serves as a model for loving your neighbor as yourself. And... knowing the humor regarding our unique relationship that Miss Mary always valued and used as a way of making the writer laugh, had she been present, her big brown eyes would have made one sweep around the group before doubling over in a fit of laughter. Using her quick mind for the purpose of calculating that the writer's face was in the minority regarding color of sin, it was extremely challenging to keep from smiling broadly due to Miss Mary's words, "ALL RIGHT GIRL", playing loudly in the air like a broken record throughout the service.

How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

(Psalm 119: 103)



See you later, dear friend.