

And the Greatest of these is L O V E

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I wish to discuss something for which all of us long, which all of us need, and without which the world can be a lonely and desolate place. I speak of love.

When I was a little boy, we children traded paper hearts at school on Valentine's Day. At night we dropped them at the doors of our friends, stamping on the porch and then running in the dark to hide.

Almost without exception those valentines had printed on their face, "I love you." I have come to know that love is more than a paper heart. Love is of the very essence of life. It is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Yet it is more than the end of the rainbow. Love is at the beginning also, and from it springs the beauty that arches across the sky on a stormy day. Love is the security for which children weep, the yearning of youth, the adhesive that binds marriage, and the lubricant that prevents devastating friction in the home; it is the peace of old age, the sunlight of hope shining through death. How rich are those who enjoy it in their associations with family, friends, church, and neighbors.

I am one who believes that love, like faith, is a gift of God. I agree with the expression, "Love cannot be forced; love cannot be coaxed and teased." (Pearl Buck in *the Treasure Chest*)

In our youth, we sometimes acquire faulty ideas of love, that it can be imposed or simply created for convenience. I noted the following in a newspaper column some years ago:

"One of the grand errors we tend to make when we are young is supposing that a person is a bundle of qualities, and we add up the individual's good and bad qualities, like a bookkeeper working on debits and credits.

"If the balance is favorable, we may decide to take the jump (into marriage)...The world is full of un-happy men and women who married because...it seemed to be a good investment.

"Love, however, is not an investment; it is an adventure. And when marriage turns out to be as dull and comfortable as a sound investment, the disgruntled party soon turns elsewhere....

"Ignorant people are always saying, 'I wonder what he sees in her (or him),' not realizing that what he (or she) see in her (or him) (and what no one else can see) is the secret essence of love." (Sydney Harris, *Deseret News*)

I think of two friends from my high school and university years. He was a boy from a country town, plain in appearance, without money or apparent promise. He had grown up on a farm, and if he had any quality that was attractive it was the capacity to work. He carried bologna sandwiches in a brown paper bag for his lunch and swept the school floors to pay his tuition. But with all of his rustic appearance, he had a smile and a personality that seemed to sing of goodness. She was a city girl who had come out of comfortable home. She would not have won a beauty contest, but she was wholesome in her decency and integrity and attractive in her decorum and dress.

Something wonderful took place between them. They fell in love. Some whispered that there were far more promising boys for her, and a gossip or two noted that perhaps other girls might have interested him. But these two laughed and danced and studied together through their school years. They married when people wondered how they could ever earn enough to stay alive. He struggled through his professional school and came out well in his class. She scrimped and saved and worked and prayed. She encouraged and sustained, and when things were really tough, she said quietly, "Somehow we can make it." Buoyed by her faith in him, he kept going through these difficult years. Children came and together they loved them and nourished them and gave them the security that came of their own love for and loyalty to one another. Now many years have passed. Their children are grown, a lasting credit to them, to the Church, and to the communities in which they live.

I remember seeing them on a plane, as I returned from an assignment. I walked down the aisle in the semidarkness of the cabin and saw a woman, white haired, her head on her husband's shoulder as she dozed. His hand was clasped warmly about hers. He was awake and recognized me. She awakened, and we talked. They were returning from a convention where he had delivered a paper before a learned society. He said little about it, but she proudly spoke of the honors accorded him.

I wish that I might have caught with a camera the look on her face as she talked of him. Forty-five years earlier people without understanding had asked what they saw in each other. I thought of that as I returned to my seat on the plane. Their friends of those days saw only a farm boy from the country and a smiling girl with freckles on her nose. But these two found in each other love and loyalty, peace and faith in the future.

There was a flowering in them of something divine, planted there by that Father who is our God. In their school days they had lived worthy of that flowering of love. They had lived with virtue and faith, with appreciation and respect for self and one another. In the years of their difficult professional and economic struggles, they had found their greatest earthly strength in their companionship. Now in mature age, they were finding peace and quiet satisfaction together. Beyond all this, they were assured of an eternity of joyful association through priesthood covenants long since made and promises long since given in the House of the Lord.

There are other great and necessary expressions of the gift of love.

Each of us can, with effort, successfully root the principle of love deep in our being so that we may be nourished by its great power all our lives. For as we tap into the power of love, we will come to understand the great truth written by John: "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God." (1 John 4:16)