

“Love Changes Everything”

MARILYN S. BATEMAN

One afternoon while driving around town, I had a CD playing in my car—a collection of Andrew Lloyd Webber songs sung by Sarah Brightman. I was preoccupied with the traffic, so the music mostly provided a soothing background. At one point, though, the lyrics of one of the songs caught my attention, and immediately I felt moved by the sentiment of these words:

*Love,
Love changes everything:
Hands and faces,
Earth and sky.
Love,
Love changes everything:
How you live and
How you die.*

[“Love Changes Everything,” lyrics by Don Black and Charles Hart, *Sarah Brightman: The Andrew Lloyd Webber Collection* (Really Useful Group, Ltd., 1997)]

I know these lyrics refer to romantic love, but I couldn’t help reflect that in relation to the gift of charity, love really does change everything. When we are possessed of Christlike love, the way we feel about ourselves, the way we feel about others, even the way we experience reality

is altered. But Christlike love isn’t the giddy wave of affection we often associate with romantic love. It is something much more subtle, something deeper. It is a love that does not alter with our moods or with external circumstances.

One of the best and most well-known descriptions we have of Christlike love is found in Moroni 7:45–47. Here Mormon stated:

And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. [Moroni 7:45]

When we really analyze all the attributes of Christlike love, achieving them can seem like a tall order. This passage may cause us to pause and ask ourselves if we manifest each of these qualities: Am I long-suffering? Am I kind? Am I humble? Do I think of others first? Do I hold my temper? But we need to remember that charity is a gift. These attributes are not simply

Marilyn S. Bateman, wife of BYU president Merrill J. Bateman, gave this -devotional address on 11 January 2000.

a to-do list; they are a description of the way we will be if we are fully in possession of this gift. The gift of charity comes from the Savior. It is possible because of His atonement. It isn't necessarily something we develop. Rather, charity is something *bestowed* upon us. When we possess charity, all of our natural human tendencies are transformed, and we relate to others in a new way.

The prophet Mormon admonished us to earnestly seek this gift of love. He stated:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son. [Moroni 7:48; emphasis added]

The gift comes, then, through earnest supplication. It comes through our faith and hope in Christ. This kind of love builds in us over time. It grows gradually as our faith in Christ grows. When we are fully possessed of it, Mormon tells us, we become even as the Savior: "That when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (Moroni 7:48).

Christlike love helps us overcome our natural fear of others. We may fear difference; we may worry about being hurt or slighted. But Christlike love is a love beyond fear. It reaches across the divide of difference. It is in our nature to serve our own interests or the interests of those closest to us. But charity takes us beyond our comfort zone. Suddenly we are less worried about whether others will approve of us. Our concern flows toward them regardless of their feelings for us.

Our family has had the opportunity to live overseas. And at times I have felt estranged from those who speak a language other than my own. It can be difficult to relate to someone whose daily habits and customs are alien to us. The distance between us can seem wide. But then I see a mother hold and soothe her baby, and an impression of recognition comes over

me. I realize she feels just as I feel. I realize we are the same. Likewise, on many occasions I have attended Church meetings conducted in languages other than my own. It amazes me that even though I do not understand what is being said, I feel the Spirit testify of God's love for these Saints. How remarkable it is to sit with a group of Saints singing a hymn in Japanese and realize that we share the same faith and hope in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. At these moments, in spite of our superficial differences, we are one.

Part of having Christlike love is this recognition of our affinities with one another. The gift of charity teaches us who we are. It teaches us who others are. The Apostle Paul testified that we are all God's children and that His desire for us is that we be exalted together:

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

[Romans 8:16–17]

Through the power of Christ's atonement we can come to recognize the powerful spiritual kinship we share with all the people of the earth. As we grow in this understanding, we can't help but be filled with a sincere love and concern for those we are asked to serve. But we need Christ to help us realize this love and perspective. We can't achieve it on our own.

Ken Mochizuki relates the story of Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat in Lithuania during World War II who, against the orders of his government, granted emergency visas to thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing from Poland (see Ken Mochizuki, *Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story* [New York: Lee and Low Books, 1997]). Shortly after the Nazis invaded Poland, hundreds of Jewish refugees gathered outside the embassy in Lithuania, entreating Mr. Sugihara for visas to give them safe passage

out of Eastern Europe. Three times Mr. Sugihara petitioned the Japanese government for permission to grant the visas. Three times his government answered no. After the third time Mr. Sugihara told his wife, "I have to do something. I may have to disobey my government, but if I don't, I will be disobeying God" (Mochizuki, *Passage*, 14). Over the course of a month Mr. Sugihara wrote out thousands of visas in his own hand so that no other person would be held responsible. Later, Mr. Sugihara and his family were imprisoned for 18 months in a Soviet internment camp. After he returned to Japan he was forced to resign from diplomatic service.

This man sought not his own safety or his own reward but sacrificed on behalf of people he did not even know. These people had little in common with him culturally, religiously, or racially. But they were people to whom he felt bound by a higher impulse, an impulse grounded in moral understanding and unselfish love. Are we willing to sacrifice personal position, comfort, and safety for our brothers and sisters? Do we pray for this kind of faith and love?

Mr. Sugihara's actions were prompted by extreme circumstances, and the personal implications of his choices were severe. We may never be called upon to make such dramatic sacrifices on behalf of others. But we, too, are daily met with choices that compel us to put aside personal comfort or gain for the sake of others. The gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to be ready to make these choices well. All of us struggle with tendencies that would keep us from choosing to serve and love others as Christ would. It isn't easy to see past ourselves. It isn't always easy to open our hearts. We may find ourselves feeling envious of others or wishing we had more. But if truly we had love, we would see things differently. At times we

may be blind to the feelings and needs of others and may need to be taught to see. We must pray continually for such discernment, conscientiousness, and humility. In short, we need to pray for charity, which is the pure love of Christ.

In 1 Timothy 1:5, Paul explained that God blesses us with the gift of charity when we have a pure heart, a clear conscience, and faith in the Savior. He explained: "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." The Lord will not bless us with charity without a pure heart. This means we must have righteous desires. The Lord will not bless us with charity without a clear conscience. This means we must be repentant and our thoughts must not be compromised by excuses, lies, or delusions. And, finally, He will not bless us with the gift of charity if we lack faith. This means we must believe steadfastly in Christ's atonement and its power to change us.

If we continue earnestly with faith and hope in Christ to seek the gift of charity, it will be granted to us. We will be filled with a love of God and of all people. Paul promised that as we attain this gift, so will we receive of a fullness of God's love:

*That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;
that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,
May be able to comprehend with all saints what
is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;
And to know the love of Christ, which passeth
knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the ful-
ness of God. [Ephesians 3:17-19]*

Brothers and sisters, may we seek this fullness, this love, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.