

Real Love

Giving frees us from the familiar territory of our own needs by opening our mind to the unexplained worlds occupied by the needs of others.

(Barbara Bush)

Diphtheria was once a common and greatly feared illness in the United States. In the 1920s there were 100,000-200,000 outbreaks each year; the annual fatality rate was 13,000-15,000 persons; a large majority of these deaths were among children. Diphtheria causes the neck of an individual to swell and block air passages, and thus it was sometimes referred to as the “bull neck” disease. One of the most famous occurrences of this illness happened in 1925 in Nome, Alaska. In an effort to save lives twenty mushers and 150 sled dogs relayed diphtheria antitoxin 674 miles across Alaska in a record-breaking five and a half days, saving Nome. Both the mushers and their dogs became heroes and are honored for their bravery each year by reenacting the serum run to Nome (the Great Race of Mercy).

This once debilitating disease respected no person and was very much prevalent in the British royal family in the late nineteenth century. One well-known case includes Queen Victoria’s second daughter, Princess Alice of Hesse. Four year old Maria, the daughter of Princess Alice, contracted diphtheria and was seriously ill. The doctors told the princess to be very careful and not endanger her life by inhaling Marie’s breath. She tried to be obedient to the caution but when Marie was gasping for air through her grossly swollen neck, Alice forgot herself, taking the little one into her arms. Rasping and struggling for life, the child said, “Momma, kiss me!” Without thinking, Alice tenderly kissed her daughter and contracted the disease which claimed her life some days later.

This tragic drama has often been seen on the stage of human history, demonstrating the fact that real love forgets self and knows no danger. Nathan Hale, a brilliant young scholar and hero of the American Revolution disguised himself and went into New York City to spy on the British. He was captured and made this statement before being hanged, “I regret that I have only one life to give for my country.” Princess Alice loved her daughter; Nathan Hale loved his country. But the greatest love story of all—God, the omnipotent creator of the universe, loved the world so much that He gave the life of His only Son on a Roman cross for us. Jesus Christ suffered, died and rose from the dead on the third day. Through Him we can receive the gift of eternal life. No hero, not even God Himself, can love and be limited. The divine Father of the universe gave His life for us so that we can find eternal life in relationship with Him.

December 6