

## **Sacrificial Love**

A friend of mine has a profoundly physically and mentally disabled child.

What makes her situation remarkable is that this is not her natural child.

She married a widower quite a few years older than herself, and the child came as part of the package.

But to watch the way she relates to the child, you wouldn't know that it was not her own.

When my friend married, the child was only two years old, so it may not have seemed too much of a stretch to have to constantly feed, bathe and dress her.

But twenty years down the track, many things have changed, and yet some things are completely unchanged.

The child is now adult-sized, much harder to dress and bathe, requiring lots more food and care, and significantly heavier to lift.

Yet I watch my friend, swathed in a large towel, seated opposite her daughter on the floor.

She patiently spoons the food, which she has prepared from scratch, carefully selecting ingredients for maximum nutrition and minimum allergic-reaction, into her daughter's mouth.

She then holds her child's mouth closed, and gently massages her throat to stimulate the swallow reflex.

She wipes away the food that dribbles from the mouth which lacks muscular control, and begins the process again.

Approximately every fourth mouthful gets regurgitated, and spat out all over my friend (hence the large towel), but her attitude never changes.

Throughout the long tedious procedure she talks gently to her daughter, telling her funny stories (which she cannot understand), crooning songs (which she cannot sing along with), but mostly talking softly to her child, telling her how beautiful and precious she is, and how much she loves her.

Her daughter rarely makes eye contact and doesn't smile.

Her mother has never heard a single word from her – only guttural grunts and ear-piercing shrieks; certainly not the beautiful sound of things such as “thank you”, or “I love you”.

Her daughter cannot hug, or give kisses.

In fact she rarely shows recognition of her mother beyond being the hand that guides the spoon.

In order to parent this child, my friend has given up pursuing any kind of career for herself, and has limited time to spend on hobbies or activities for her own enjoyment.

She doesn't get anywhere near as much time with her husband as she would like.

Holidays are virtually unheard of, and spontaneity is a word that hasn't been in her vocabulary for years.

She is not free to socialise much outside her home, or to have friends to visit.

She has learnt that, as much as she loves her daughter, other people are embarrassed by her disability, so she tends to follow solitary pursuits.

Because of her child's special needs, finances are limited, respite opportunities are few, and she has accepted that this will most likely be a life-long pattern.

I marvel at her dedication and self-sacrifice.

She receives nothing in this relationship, none of the usual precious moments that keep us going in our role as parents.

She does all the giving, and her daughter does all the receiving.

And yet, as impressive as this example of human love may be, there is another love which far surpasses even that in its level of sacrifice.

Eph 5:2 NKJV And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

God's love is greater, more constant, more compassionate than anything we will ever experience.

He was so moved by our state of utter helplessness, blind to our own sin, deaf to the only voice which offers help, that He sacrificed the life of His only son, in order to adopt us as His own children.

While we were still groping in darkness, He saw us as beautiful, precious, a prize worth paying any price for.

And what a price He paid.

He allowed His son's body to be broken, and His blood shed, because nothing else would be good enough to purchase our freedom.

It's that freedom we celebrate with communion.

Let's honour the amazing love that has purchased freedom and healing for us.