

## “Face to Face”

Rev. David Duquette

February 3, 2013

Love pays the price.

This week’s Internet sensation that set the social media ablaze showed us Pastor’s in a bad light: Earlier this week, an Applebee’s waitress posted a photo on Reddit of a receipt from a ... pastor who, instead of leaving the suggested 18 percent tip, wrote “I give God 10%, why should you get 18.”

Now, after the bill went viral, Applebee's has fired the waitress, according to Consumerist. “I thought the note was insulting, but it was also comical,” the waitress, whose name is Chelsea, told Consumerist. “I posted it to Reddit because I thought other users would find it entertaining.”

Apparently once the receipt hit the Internet, the ... pastor forgot the Golden Rule of “love thy neighbor” and called the Applebee’s where Chelsea works to demand that she and all management involved be fired.<sup>1</sup>

She was indeed fired, and as of Friday, the Facebook page urging that she be re-hired had over 10,000 likes in 24 hours, and Applebee’s and the Rev. Alois Bell had issued statements defending and apologizing (in the pastor’s case) for their actions.

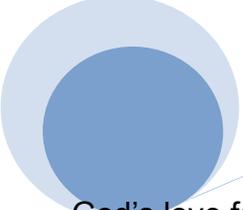
*1 Corinthians 13:4–8 (NIV84) <sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. <sup>8</sup> Love never fails.*

Love leaves a tip, not an insulting note. And while it is easy to focus on this pastor and what she did, her behavior challenges this pastor to examine himself. What are the ways that I fail to show God’s love? How do I treat the people who serve me? What does this story invite me to do differently so I might offer “the least of these” a chance to experience God’s love face to face?

Rev. Bell did not love Chelsea, and her story is not unique. We are witnessing the power of two love stories and how we go wrong. Comparing and contrasting these stories challenges us as to who we love and how we love. Are we giving our neighbor, are we giving one another a chance to experience

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<sup>1</sup> January 31, 2013. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/31/applebees-waitress-fired-god-tip-receipt\\_n\\_2591794.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=mostpopular](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/31/applebees-waitress-fired-god-tip-receipt_n_2591794.html?utm_hp_ref=mostpopular)



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God's love face to face?

♥ “Les Miserables” starring Ray Lewis

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Tonight is the Super Bowl, and we Eagles and Steelers fans, (even the Cowboys and Giants fans in our midst) we can all unite tonight and say, “Myeh.”

What did that pastor write on the receipt again?

No, tonight marks the final game in the Hall of Fame career of the Ravens’ linebacker and leader, Ray Lewis. His play on the field has earned him a place with Dick Butkus and Lawrence Taylor in the conversation, “Who is the greatest linebacker of all time?”

This week should be a coronation for Ray, and there has been some of that, but the spotlight has been merciless. Did Ray use deer antler spray (which contains a banned substance) to speed his recovery from injury this year? Ray’s character and Christian witness have been harshly criticized, but the greater lack of mercy was reflected in the immediate response to the early accolades Ray was receiving that reminded us of a terrible event early in his career.

In January 2000, Ray and his group were leaving a nightclub in Atlanta when a fight broke out. Two men were stabbed to death. Ray was initially charged with murder. By the time the dust settled, he was convicted of a misdemeanor charge of obstruction of justice, received the largest fine in the history of the NFL at that time (\$250,000), and reached an out-of-court settlement with the victims’ families.

Since that tragedy, Ray has become a great leader and mentor who has steered many troubled athletes down a better path and is an outspoken Christian. He is beloved by some and hated by others. There is a website that offers a “Haters Guide to Ray Lewis.”

Ray’s story offers some interesting comparisons with the story of Jean Valjean, the protagonist of the classic novel that inspired the classic musical which has become a classic movie – “Les Miserables.”

As a young man, Valjean steals a loaf of bread to feed his hungry daughter. He is sentenced to 5 years hard labor and his attempts to escape add to his term such that Prisoner 24601 serves 19



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years. At his parole, Inspector Javert tells him that he will always be Prisoner 24601 and gives him papers that declare him to be “a dangerous man.”

These papers prevent Valjean from building a new life. No one will hire him. No one will house him. Starving and cold, he finds his way to a church where the Bishop welcomes him, gives him a meal, and a warm place for the night.

But Valjean has seen the silver, and during the night, he steals as much silver as he can carry. He is quickly apprehended, and when the police take him to the Bishop, the Bishop says that there has been a misunderstanding. “You forgot to take the silver candlesticks and left the best behind.” After the police leave, the Bishop tells Valjean, “Remember this my brother, see in this a higher plan, you must use this precious silver to become an honest man.”

Valjean does, but to Inspector Javert, he is always Prisoner 24601, “a dangerous man” who broke parole. Javert hounds Valjean to the end of both of their lives, because for him, the law must be obeyed. There can be no mercy.

When my pilgrim group watched the movie last week, the question we were given (and I give to you) was, “What character do you relate to, and why?”

Reading the reactions to the pastor who stiffed the waitress and to the rise and fall and rise of Ray Lewis brought Inspector Javert to mind and those citizens who turned Jean Valjean away; those who in the name of law and order and what is right kept a record of wrongs, failed to protect, failed to trust, failed to hope, failed to persevere. They failed to love.

And when I read about them and rebuke them for their lack of love, when I see the contrast between what they did and what a Christian is called to do, I am looking into a mirror and seeing myself face to face.

### ♥ Face to Face

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The great Jesuit theologian Teilard de Chardin wrote, “Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [http://thinkexist.com/quotes/teilhard\\_de\\_chardin/](http://thinkexist.com/quotes/teilhard_de_chardin/)

1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Psalm 71:1-6; Luke 4:21-30



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“Love alone is capable of uniting living beings in such a way as to complete and fulfill them, for it alone takes them and joins them by what is deepest in themselves.”<sup>3</sup>

We confine 1 Corinthians 13 to the wedding day. The bride walks down the aisle. The groom takes her hand. “Do you?” “I do.” And then we’re done; then we put these words away until the next time a marriage covenant is to be made.

But *1 Corinthians 13:4–5 (NRSV)* “*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude*” are not words for the day; love is a way of life. Love is the way of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the purpose of our earthly lives, the calling to be a church, is simply to learn to love.

Ray Lewis grew up in the church. He was a junior deacon and could quote Scripture at age 4 and in the aftermath of their victory over the Broncos, he immediately quoted the Bible. His pastor Dr. Jamal Bryant of the Empowerment Temple AME Church in Baltimore, Md<sup>4</sup> spoke of Ray’s involvement in the life of the church. While Lewis has been a member of Empowerment Temple and a friend of Bryant’s for about seven years, the linebacker has partnered with the church in community outreach efforts, and has been very active in charitable work throughout his career.

Ray has loved and been loved by his church.

Throughout Les Mis, whenever Valjean’s life falls apart, he returns to the church for refuge and respite. In the end, he dies there after declaring, “To love another person is to see the face of God.” And when he dies, it is Fantine, whom he tried to save and whose daughter Cosette he raised and that Bishop whose love saved him who greet him; Fantine and the Bishop are the face of God.

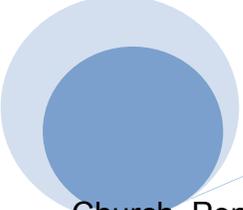
That’s what we want. That’s what everyone wants; to see the face of God. I suspect this is part of the reason why there has been such a powerful reaction to the Pastor’s comments on the receipt. We come to church looking for more, and when instead we see less, less patience, less kindness, more envy and boasting and arrogance and rudeness, we feel betrayed. We know there’s more than this. We know the church is better than this.

And when we see Les Mis, and we see the Bishop love and the church save and a man’s life change; and, we see the change a Jean Valjean and a Ray Lewis can accomplish because of the love of God they found in the church, we see what we want. We see what we can be. We see what we, the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> <http://global.christianpost.com/news/ray-lewis-pastor-talks-linebackers-christian-witness-on-the-football-field-89079/#Dw7oCOmS4BmDXjiB.99>



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Church, Pennside Presbyterian Church, we see what we were created to be.

“To love another person is to see the face of God.” Love one another. Love the other. Love “the least of these.” Now, we see in a mirror dimly, but when we love, we see God, and God is seen in us, face to face. Amen.