Paul said in First Corinthians that we are given faith, hope, and love, and that the greatest of these is love. And First John says that God is love. These are indeed some of the most popular scriptures in the Bible because the images we tend to get are of mother loving a child or of a young couple in love. And that’s fine as far as it goes, but it is a bit too sentimental to capture the entire truth.

Love, while very evocative of feeling is, to use the words of the rock group Boston, “more than a feeling.”

I submit that the warm feeling we have when we look at our beloved is not love, but simply one of the ways the brain interprets love. Love is known through the emotions, but is separate from them.

My mother was probably the first person from whom I felt love, even while still in her womb.

My mother and father had two children, my brother and me. Father put mother in charge of our religious education because, though he loved the Lord, he didn’t think much of preachers. Mother took, sometimes dragged, us to church.

She wasn’t ever much of a singer, but I remember standing next to her in the pew as we sang “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus; What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

I remember this even yet with a warm feeling.

But love doesn’t always feel good.

Then she was stricken with dementia which is taking her from my brother and me in stages.

Mother first lost interest in housekeeping. This was a subtle sign, because, in spite of her many fine qualities, it had never interested her much. But then she lost in-
My mother was probably the first person from whom I felt love, even while still in her womb.

...Jesus expressed his love to us as he endured the pain of the cross. God’s love was presented to us perfect in pain.

She didn’t remember.
The next visit she didn’t know my name. The next she didn’t remember I was her son.

She has gone from the woman who raised my brother and me to be college-educated men to someone who doesn’t know us. We feel love for her, but the love is no longer manifested as pleasure but as pain.

This is something I can think about as I remember that Jesus expressed his love to us as he endured the pain of the cross. God’s love was presented to us perfect in pain. As the old spiritual says, “Sometimes it makes me tremble, tremble, tremble.”

The love is not the pleasure, the love is not the pain, but the love is something beyond either of those and the pleasure and the pain and the millions of feelings in between are simply the way our human brains interpret that love.

As Paul said, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

To me, this is a promise that one day we will be able to push beyond the feelings. We will be able to experience love as itself, fully, untranslated, un-interpreted.

One might be expected to feel joy at this prospect, but that joy might be diluted with fear. While I might look forward to the pleasure, I also know the pain. The thing the two have in common is the intensity. Perhaps I should simply look forward in humility.

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