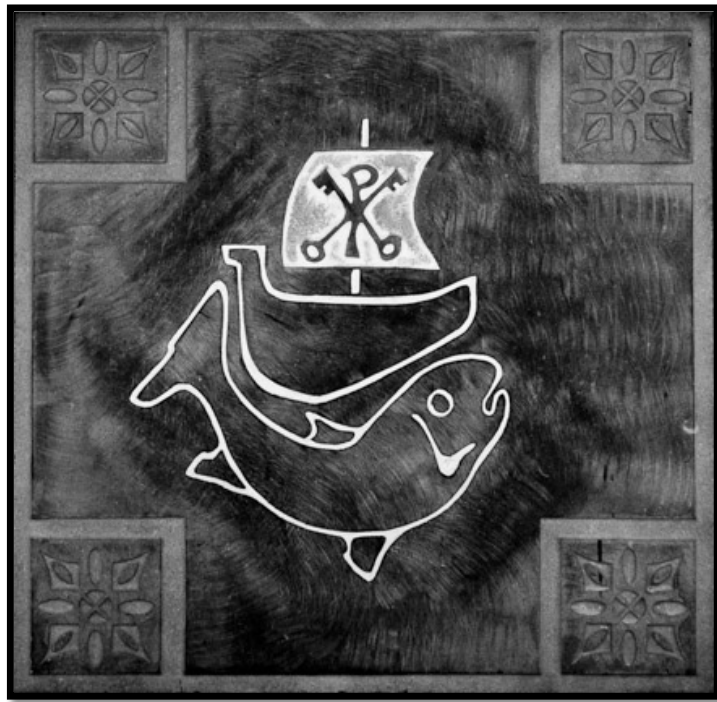


Patrick Rader Lafferty



behind pulpit at St. Mary's Cathedral, Killarney, Ireland c.lafferty 2011

“The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing — to reach the Mountain, to find the place where all the beauty came from...”

Orual in C.S. Lewis' *Till We Have Faces*

The Lafferty Clan



Emerald Lake, Rocky Mountain National Park

The Wife

Christy spends her time homeschooling their 3 children, helping people heal, leading a research foundation for Juvenile Diabetes, reading intriguing books, watching movies, riding her bicycle, camping and hiking whenever there is time. She hopes to one day use her 2 masters degrees in Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary, where she met her husband. She is also an award-winning photographer and loves to pull out Penelope, her camera, for a creative outlet. Her photography website is picturealegacy.com. She is also a volunteer for Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep, an infant bereavement portrait organization.

The Oldest

Seamus is 13 years old and loves to read books about as much as he loves caring for his animals. He has 11 chickens which he enters in the Texas State Fair each year, a bearded dragon, a box turtle, a cat, a fish, and a Diabetes Alert Dog named Koda.

The Girl

Savannah is 10 years old is artistic & creative almost every waking hour. She adores her American Girl doll and loves books. She has to be told to put her book away when it's time to eat. She spends her time sewing stuffed animals and clothes and despises patterns. She loves bossing her brothers around, is a fierce competitor, a budding storyteller & playwright.

The Youngest

Jedidiah is 6, but has been blessed with height beyond his years. He has already outgrown his sister and is fast approaching his brother. He loves all things athletic and is quite witty. He has more energy than the rest of the family put together. Jedidiah is inquisitive about almost everything around him. He spends his time riding his bike, drawing in his art tablet and sword fighting with his brother.

Patrick's Hobbies, Interests, & Assorted Faves

Hobbies

- Reading
- Writing—in particular the “Pastoral Backstory” @ ctktexas.com
- Drones & Model Rocketry
- Camping & hiking
- Playing the piano
- Music, dancing, & concerts

Interests

- Film
- Garrison Keillor
- Collegiate & Pro Sports
- Russophilia
- All things Irish

Films

- The Shawshank Redemption
- The Lord of the Rings
- The Empire Strikes Back
- Amadeus
- Chariots of Fire
- The Tree of Life
- The Wrath of Khan
- Moulin Rouge
- E.T.
- The Insider
- Raising Arizona
- The Mission
- The Princess Bride

Blogroll

- Snakes and Ladders (and anything by Alan Jacobs)
- Mockingbird (mbird.com)
- MereOrthodoxy.com
- FirstThings.com
- Catholic Authenticity (Melinda Selmys)
- SpiritualFriendship.org
- Malcolm Gladwell

Music

- East Asheville Hardware, David Wilcox
- The Joshua Tree, U2
- Lux Aeterna, Lauridsen
- Billy Joel Greatest Hits
- Darkest Night of the Year, Over the Rhine
- Symphony of Sorrowful Songs, Gorecki
- Johnny Cash Greatest Hits



JAN
28
2010

by Patrick Lafferty



Choose this day whom you will serve.
Joshua 24:15

You don't know if you're more enthralled by his intellect or his coiffure. Robert Sapolsky is a renowned professor of biological and neurological science at Stanford University. He has spent years analyzing the behavior patterns of baboons, and his research has focused in the domain of primatology.

Sapolsky is also a self-proclaimed strident atheist, sans the acrimonious air typified by Richard Dawkins. Yet in [a recent commencement address](#), Sapolsky appealed to theology as the basis for his argument for the uniqueness of the human race. He devoted most of his address to establishing the commonalities of humans and other primates. Aspects of human behavior like culture, cultural transmission, communication, empathy, and aggression were all shown to have complements within other primate species. All that distinguished humanity was the degree to which those aspects had been developed.

But near the conclusion of his comments, he conceded that one feature of humanity set it dramatically apart from all other forms of life: the ability to hold two seemingly contradictory truths in mind simultaneously, and to find the proof of the possibility of something in its apparent impossibility.

Mercifully, he provided two examples to rescue his thesis from cold abstraction. The first was from the Danish Christian and existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who said that Christian faith is “a faith that persists in the face of its own impossibility.” In other words, from a purely human perspective, part of what catalyzes faith is the acknowledgment of how impossible it seems. Even as I write that, I'm not sure I get what he means, which is why I'm glad Sapolsky gave one more example—this time from Sister Helen Prejean. (You may remember her from *Dead Man Walking*, the film based on her ministry to death-row inmates.) When asked what would motivate her to care for the most deplorable of our society, according to Sapolsky, Prejean said, “The less forgivable the act, the more it must be forgiven; the less loveable the person is, the more you must find the means to love them.”

For Prejean, recognizing how impossibly difficult it would be to forgive someone made forgiving them not only possible but necessary. Believing someone to be unlovable made it morally imperative to love them. Call it an oxymoron or just a

paradox, humanity distinguishes itself, Sapolsky argues, by how it can powerfully believe what is seemingly unbelievable. This he considered “the most irrational magnificent thing we are capable of as a species.”

As we heard [Sunday](#), Joshua pressed Israel to trust in the Lord despite plenty of reasons not to. Prospering civilizations built on many alternative conceptions of the divine surrounded the fledgling nation. Their presence presented ample rationale not to trust the one, true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even Israel’s own experience revealed a world full of incongruity, chaos, and sorrow that made it seem impossible to believe in a sovereign God. Yet Israel, in a Sapolskian sense, did the most human thing possible by believing in what seemed unbelievable.

This hard-wired feature of humanity also finds expression in anyone who believes in the gospel of Jesus. All things now living will one day succumb to death—inexorably and irreversibly. Yet foundational to our faith is the belief that God brought a man back from death, and that in Him began the overturning of death. This is a tenet so seemingly absurd and yet so critical to our believing. “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” ([1 Cor. 15:19](#)).

That’s not the only pillar of our faith that requires this capacity Sapolsky identifies. For the implication of Christ’s death and resurrection reveals another apparently irresolvable tension: that we are more deplorable than we care to admit, and yet more prized than we can imagine. Jesus’ suffering proves that. Those truths seem impossible to hold simultaneously. Yet their apparent irreconcilability yields a more profound and believable truth: this eminently just God is undeniably for us. That’s why the “love of Christ controls us” ([2 Cor. 5:14](#)). His love—not the preference for absurdity—is what explains Kierkegaard’s and Prejean’s faith. It must also be what explains ours.

What point can be made from Sapolsky’s observation that humans have the unique capacity to believe quite strongly in the face of equally strong reasons not to believe? Has your zeal for God waned? Have your circumstances begun to cripple the confidence you once had in the goodness of God? Finding renewed faith may require circling back to the most absurd foundations of our faith. Considering the salutary effects of holding to the ethical demands of godliness is helpful. But ethics must be buttressed by the deeper truths that motivate it: that Christ rose again and that, despite your unholiness, this Holy God is for you. If such impossible things be true, then hope shall find its way into all other concerns.

Trust Him. You’re only human.