

*Do thy friends despise, forsake
thee?*

*Take it to the Lord in prayer.
In His arms He'll take and
shield thee,*

Thou wilt find a solace there.

*What a Friend We Have in
Jesus, LSB #770*

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Catharines, Ontario.*

Loving the Unlovable

Finding our way to the mind of Christ

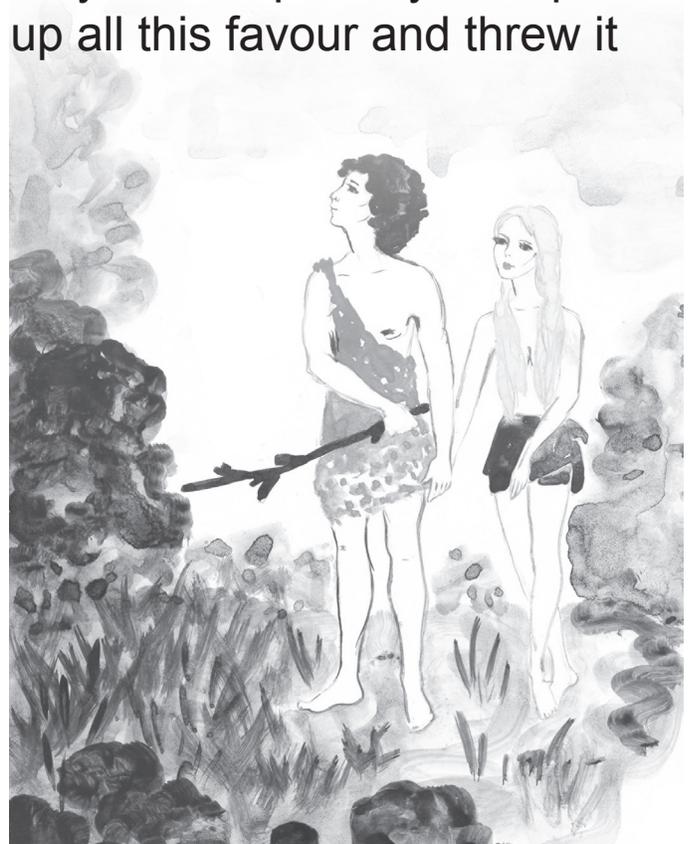
By Rev. Dr. Robert Bugbee

PICTURE THAT LITTLE

WALK the Lord took in Eden's garden right after our first parents, Adam and Eve, trampled on His command and threw themselves into a life of sin (Genesis 3:1-8). Picture the pain heaven's Father must have felt. He had formed this man and woman in love. Had breathed life into their nostrils. Had given them honour over His other creatures. Had set them into a paradise so complete that they didn't need a Bible or a preacher or a Sunday service to draw close to Him. Had poured out so much affection that they didn't

hesitate to approach Him. He was theirs, and they were His.

Prodded by the evil one, they tore it up. They crumpled up all this favour and threw it



back into the Lord's face, you might say. It isn't just that they ate a bit of fruit as if that were the heart of the problem. The predicament ran deeper. They had decided to believe the lie that God was not their Friend and did not mean it well with them. They took their trust away from Him. Now so much lay ruined. Creation's harmony would be shattered by conflict and decay. These gorgeous, healthy people now stood under a cloud, since weakness and death were headed their way. Not only had they decided God wasn't their Friend. They began treating Him as people handle an enemy. They avoided Him. They hid behind the trees. They hoped He'd leave them alone. When He called out to get the conversation going, they gave clipped, defensive answers. They were already good at sounding hostile.

Picture that little walk the Lord took in the garden after it all happened. It's likely not hard to picture how **you**

might handle things. You may remember how you have already handled situations like that sometimes. When you know another person views you as an enemy (even if you did nothing to make it so), it's hard to go into a conversation without being defensive yourself. When you watch someone take a large helping of kindness you've dished out, only to trample over it and pay you back with ingratitude, the stage is set for bitterness to enter. There can even be the feeling that you'd like to see that person experience bad things; he's got it coming to him! If a third party encourages you to work on a peaceful solution—and, deep down, you know you ought to be willing—you may feel that the person troubling you at least is going to have to make the first move. After all, he started it! If no solution comes, you may make your peace with letting the broken relationship stay broken. Meanwhile, it can seem okay to gossip to

others about that person you've struggled with. You may even find that, while it's easy to speak that way to other people, you may not be very quick to speak to the Lord about it and to name that "former friend" in your prayers, especially not in prayers that ask God's mercy on that person. That has quite likely been your way sometimes. Sometimes it has been mine, too.

The true God did it all differently when He took His little walk in the garden. He did not wait for Adam and Eve to make the first move. Though He didn't have to, God spoke first: "Where are you?" Yes, those first parents of ours were ungrateful rebels. They had torn up the relationship with their Father. But the Lord did not give up on that relationship so easily. He drew them out with questions. Carefully but clearly He helped them see the calamity they had touched off. Yes, there were consequences to be faced. The earth would

become a wilderness; one could eat from it, but only through sweaty, painful work. And, yes, the people the Lord had formed from dust would die and return to dust. But the God of mercy refused to leave them in the dust. Already then—long before manger and shepherds and Magi, long before trial and suffering and dying on a cross, long before the Name "Jesus" was ever spoken—the wounded Father walking in Eden's garden vowed a Descendant would come to smash the serpent's head and the destruction he had caused. This Descendant would buy back these rebels who had treated their Father so shamefully.

This is incredible. And it's true. In Jesus Christ, it has come true for you. It's what moved a gifted poet over 200 years ago to sit down and write:

*What wondrous love is this,
O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this,
O my soul!*

*What wondrous love is this, that
caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse
for my soul, for my soul,
To bear the dreadful curse
for my soul!*

*Lutheran Service Book,
#543, st. 1*

Adam and Eve could have sung that if they had lived to see it fulfilled as you and I have. But it's not just Adam and Eve who only had hope because the Lord responded with love to their rebellion. The bottomless mercy of a forgiving God, shown in Jesus, is the only hope for me, too. And it's your only hope. I say personally to you reading these lines at this moment: It doesn't matter who you are; whether your past is littered with foul words and destructive actions that are out there for everybody to see, or even if you have been a solid member of the church who looks like a great example for others. You only have hope because the Father who took His evening walk in Eden's

garden has not come to you anxious to punish. He didn't even wait for you to make the first move! He went ahead and gave His Son; went ahead and sent the message into the world that brings this Son to needy people; went ahead and saw to it that this freeing message came to you in your lifetime, turned your heart toward Jesus, and gave you courage to believe Him.

This says something about approaching unlovable people. You don't have to look far to find them; they're all around you. Some of them may be your relatives, or even live under the same roof with you. Some might be co-workers at the place where you earn your living. Some may be next door neighbours who make you wish they didn't live next door. Some may belong to your church. Some may be total unbelievers, and others confessing Christians. Some may not take care of their bodies very well, so that they

give off odours and make you want to keep your distance. Some talk in a way that always seems to complain, or comes off as negative and repeatedly accusatory toward you. Some may have broken promises they made you, not just once, but time and time again. Some may be the sort who volunteer for a task or project, but are so difficult that you just know in advance their involvement will create problems. Some may have hurt you so badly that you'd just as soon run the other way and forget them for good. And many of those people seem as though they're never going to change.

I cannot compile a listing of "10 easy steps" to follow to magically make you love the unlovable in your life. But the mind of Christ—taking shape inside you—can do what lists and pointers never accomplish. You see this in the Father Himself who promised to send His Son long before human beings actually got to see Jesus. You see it in Jesus, praying for

people who were happy they were getting Him killed and for the ones pounding spikes into His holy body. "Father, forgive them," He said. "They don't know what they're doing."

You see it in believers who can say, as Paul did, "Christ lives in me." This means I don't run the show in my life and conduct anymore. Jesus does. And when you grasp the liberating truth that Jesus did not just show this mind toward other unlovable people, long ago and far away, but that this is the mind He shows when He comes to you, it has a way of taking hold inside. Then it dawns on you that one of the most concrete ways of giving love back to Jesus is to give it away to the people Jesus has placed all around you.

This mind of Christ helps you see even the most unlovable people with a fresh pair of eyeglasses. They are not just annoyances to be endured or an unwelcome drain on your time and energy. They are the objects

of Christ's love. They can also be one of your biggest chances to make His mercy seem very real to another person.

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Is there a “Donald” in your life?

By Judy Hagen

As Christian women we reach out to many groups, but seldom do we go along a path with one individual who just doesn't “fit in.”

DONALD CAME INTO MY LIFE in 1986 when my husband ran for political office.

At the first all-candidates meeting a ruffled, dishevelled young man went to the microphone. He was incoherent, talking in circles. Then, when everyone could finally make out what he wanted to say, our campaign team realized he was “one of us.” Sure enough, he started coming to the campaign office. No one was very comfortable about assigning him a job because it was obvious he

had many physical, mental and social issues, but he loved my husband and wanted to work for him. We couldn't find many suitable jobs for Donald but he was out campaigning in HIS world, riding buses and having meals at the soup kitchen. Since he could not hold down a job, he was faithfully at the campaign office every day. We became the centre of his world and soon knew more about him.

As a young child he was raised in a dysfunctional home with issues that caused the provincial ministry to place him in a facility known as Woodlands. When that home closed, Donald returned to the community and was living semi-independently. He became part