



## Yes, Indeed—What Kind of Love is This?

by Rev. Jody Rinas

**SOME YEARS BACK** a Roman Catholic father from Virginia saved his son from drowning. But this was not your typical swimming pool incident. Thomas Vander Woude had, like most days, gone to mass in the morning, and then spent the day working on his farm with Joseph, age 20, the youngest of his seven sons. Joseph fell through the collapsed cover into the septic tank in their back yard. Brushing off fear and disgust, Thomas jumped in after him. He submerged himself in sewage so that he might push Joseph up from below and keep his head above the muck. When they finally arrived, the rescue workers could not revive Thomas. Joseph, who also had Down Syndrome, was in critical condition and on a ventilator, so he didn't know that his dad had died while inhaling human excrement.

The reporter telling the story described Thomas' lifetime of service. Vander Woude was a pilot in Vietnam, school soccer coach, and dedicated volunteer at church, beside his vocation of husband, dad, and grandfather. Friends said that his life was spent sacrificing himself and helping people. Loved ones said that his favourite job was the one he did while dying—being a good dad.

What kind of love is this? It's the same question we repeat four times

in hymn #542 in *Lutheran Service Book*, "When I Behold Jesus Christ." In the above story, the father showed courageous love and made the ultimate sacrifice by exchanging his life for his son's. In routine ways or heroic, we emulate Christ toward others. Love for the neighbour is proved in action both ordinary and dramatic. Some acts of love burn long, stretching into years of attentive care. Other movements are instantaneous, intense, momentary. They may come in "duty calls" as when a fireman rushes into a building to rescue total strangers. Likewise we can be impressed by the tender love of a father for his son. Though I dare say, these loves are not quite the same.

A fine devotional exercise: scan the hymnbook and see how we sing about love. I'll let you, the reader, confirm my accuracy at your own pace. Two hymns have *Love* as their first word. You'll find twenty-two other hymns with *Love* in the title. That gives twenty-four with which to start. Five of these are found in the "Sanctification" section. We could of course expect that many others will mention love throughout the course of their stanzas. Just turn some pages to find what kind of love is being extolled.

In good Lutheran fashion we might also ask who is doing the loving—God or man? Seventeen of those twenty-four hymns accent God's love. That balance

sheet seems appropriately lopsided. Divine love indeed excels all other loves (*LSB* #700). Man's love is not always reliable, but God's love never fails, deep and wide as it is. The weight rightly rests on the gospel of God's gracious favour toward man.

This fits well with the season of Lent, in which we walk with Jesus to the cross, where love reaches its apex. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13 RSV). A fine Lenten hymn choice would then be #544, "O Love, How Deep." We are led to sing through the ordinary and triumphant ways in which the Son of God loved throughout His earthly life and ministry. To emphasize the target of His love, many of the lines in this hymn begin with the words "For us." One thing, however, is not mentioned. Though Jesus' path to the cross was traced "for us," He undertook His pilgrimage also as a loving Son obeying His Father's will. In performing this work of self-sacrifice, Jesus fulfilled the divine command to love both God and man.

For sinners who have been in the church many years, the story of Jesus' love grows familiar. And where sinners listen, there is some truth to the phrase, "familiarity breeds contempt." God keep us from growing dull in

*continued next page*

*What kind of love, continued*

hearing the inspiring account of Jesus' love! Preachers work to proclaim the message in ever new and creative ways, but it can be a challenge. The shock of Christ's passion lessens as we hear it repeatedly. Like other things, we can take it for granted.

But the shock factor in the septic tank story slaps us out of our stupor. It should make us squirm and cringe a bit. In gruesome picture, the father showed his strong love for his son. Reverse this, and you can see the Son of God's shocking love for His Father and for all mankind. It should make us a little uneasy that God would so dearly love (LSB #392) human beings who can often be gruesome in their words and deeds.

Yet this picture should also comfort us. On the cross, the Father gives His Son as a sacrifice, that mankind might be pulled from drowning in a pool of guilt and shame which threaten to overwhelm us in eternal death. "When I was sinking down" (LSB #543), the Lord jumped into the mess after me. He breathed our poisoned air; He drank for us the dark despair (LSB #834). He inhales the cup of wrath. He offers His life. He loves His neighbours so much as to push them up from below, into heaven above.

I would be remiss if not noting that Mr. Vander Woude earlier had come home from a divine service of the Holy Communion. Though I do not know if he partook of the elixir of life that morning, it remains true that the Sacrament of the Altar is the "salutary gift" by which the Lord strengthens us in faith toward Him and in fervent love toward one another (LSB #201). With Christ then in us, we're not afraid to love.

*The Rev. Jody A. Rinas is pastor at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Clifford, Ontario.*

## Easter

She stood in silence to watch Him die.  
She held back the tears as she heard Him cry!  
"Father, why hast thou forsaken me?"  
Her body shook, from pain within.  
How could they do this; to crucify Him?  
She knew not why.

The sky turned black, the winds unfurled  
Tossing the hair and the cloak of the hapless girl.  
Then racked with pain His eyes searched the throng  
Why was He there? He had done no wrong!  
And then He knew.

An eerie calm hovered over the crowd.  
Just as His plaintive voice spoke out loud.  
"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."  
And it was over.

Gentle hands placed Him in a small stone room.  
A gigantic boulder was the seal for this tomb.  
Two days she came there to mourn and to pray.  
That the horrors that passed she could just wash away.

A miracle occurred that next precious night.  
For the stone that had entrapped Him was rolled out of sight.

In awe, she saw Him. He had risen from the dead  
With a smile on His lips, and His future ahead  
To go with His Father, spread comfort and grace.  
Help all people and there would be a better place!

And it began —  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

*Gwendolyn Whissell*