

Love stories

A funeral meditation on 1 John 3:11, 16-24

Wanda Roth Amstutz

In recent weeks I have witnessed the intertwining of two love stories.

I have witnessed a chapter in a beautiful love story embracing John Janzen's family. It is a story of a devoted husband and wife, a father and his daughters, a grandfather and his grandchildren. I consider it a great privilege of my role as pastor to be invited to walk with families as they say goodbye to one they dearly love. So I was honoured to be there while Irma sat at John's side, loving her husband as she has so faithfully for fifty-six years. I was privileged to read a granddaughter's tender, humorous tribute to her grandfather. I was blessed to sit in the hospital room while John's four daughters sang in sweet harmony the old familiar hymns he loved. Holding his hands and stroking his hair, they gently kissed him and whispered, "I love you, Dad." I was moved to sit with his family after he died, hearing them reminisce about him as a young man, a husband, a father, a father-in-law, a grandfather.

In reading and reflecting on the words of 1 John 3, I also witness an unfolding love story. In fact the entire story the scriptures relate is about a God who is unfailingly and wholeheartedly in love with the wonderful creation she has birthed. Over and over God reaches out to humanity in love, seeking a relationship with creation, even as humanity repeatedly turns its back on its creator. In the stories of the Bible we witness God's quest for new ways to draw his children back, to remind them of the love he has for them. Finally, when all other options seem to have been exhausted, God chooses to come to humanity in Jesus, the ultimate example of love. As the author of 1 John writes, "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us" (3:16a).

This love story continues as the great gift of divine love offered to us in Jesus elicits an answering love in us: "For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love

one another. . . . Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” Because we have been given the model of sacrificial love, because so much love has been offered to us, we are to respond by offering the same kind of love to those around us.

The love story of John Janzen’s family and the story of God’s love for humanity intertwine. John must have known the love Christ had for him, because he seemed to have so much love to give others. Whether John was giving his time and expertise and money to his family, or helping unfortunate children through a fund for international children, or serving as a conscientious objector during World War 2, or joking and playing with his grandchildren, or oohing and aahing over his beautiful wife, or praying to be ever mindful of those less fortunate, he lived love well.

And the love story of the Janzen family does not end here. The love that John offered to you, his friends and family, does not die here but lives on in your hearts. You will pass it on to your own families and friends. You will offer to the world the same love that John did. Social worker Leah de Roulet, who works with people who have terminal cancer, writes that our purpose in life “is to

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somehow enhance each other’s humanity—to love, to touch each other’s lives. . . . By and large, the meaning of a person’s life gets distilled to ‘How well have I loved?’ A person can then find hope in believing: somebody loved me and I loved him or her and those memories that my loved one carries forward will shimmer on inside my children and grandchildren and beyond.”¹

The love story we find in the scriptures also goes on. Because of this story we are not overcome today, although our hearts are full

of grief and sadness: we know that the love story between John and his God continues. Our God loved us so much that he sent his Son to live among us, to show us love by his example, and to die for our sins so that we do not have to die. John, a man who knew how to love well, is being well loved by his creator. That same love is awaiting each of us.

May these two intertwined love stories inspire us. As we recognise our creator's never-ending love for us, may we be inspired to love our families more deeply, to love our neighbours more tangibly, and to love more generously those who have little of this world's goods. May we be comforted to know that John is safe, at peace, and celebrating with the one who loves him and each of us far more than we can imagine or comprehend. Amen.

Note

¹ David Friend, *The Meaning of Life: Reflections in Words and Pictures on Why We Are Here* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991); quoted in John R. Bodo, *Sourcebook for Funerals* (Canton, Ohio: Communication Resources, Inc., 1998), 163.

About the author

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