

# Stand guard by our tree

## A family's gift takes on special meaning

by Kurt Reinhardt

**A**s the snow drifts across the ground in the open fields around Trinity Lutheran Church outside Kurtzville, Ontario, one lone dark tombstone stands up out of the white blanket like a sentinel in the back corner of the church's cemetery. The grave stands alone near a large old maple tree that used to mark the back corner of the church property. This single grave is the only one in a new section for a special reason.

Almost a decade ago the family living beside the church decided to follow the pattern of others who had lived on their farm before them and give a parcel of land to the church. The first parcel was given in 1874 when the congregation was founded. The gift of this latest parcel came with only one request—that the neighbour and his wife might have a plot there when they died.

Trinity gratefully accepted the gift of land but left it as part of the farm's pasture until it might be needed. The church still had plenty of room in its cemetery for its current needs. One cool spring evening, however, I received a phone call that changed our plans. A relative of our neighbour called to tell me the neighbour's son had been killed in Afghanistan. I didn't know they had a son in the military, let alone one who was serving in Afghanistan. They have thirteen children with only a few still at home.

I immediately called the chairman and an elder to tell them the news and discuss what we might do. The first thing that came to mind was to offer a cemetery plot for his burial. After the phone calls I walked over to the farm to offer my condolences and make the offer to help. The parents were gathered together with their family and coping in faith with the tragic loss of their child. They gratefully received our offer and asked that their son might be buried in the land they had given to the church.

The congregation was honoured to do all it could not only for our neighbour but also for a Canadian soldier who had made the ultimate sacrifice for his country. In the days following we worked together with our neighbour to open up the new section and make it ready for those who attend the committal. In those days I had many long and mutually fruitful conversations with the young man's father about our faith and what Christ has done for us.

With the faith of Job he talked about his willingness to even give up his son if that is what the Lord would ask of him. He was haunted by concerns over the state of his son's faith when he died. I encouraged him to entrust him into the arms of God's mercy and put his hope in the Lord and His death for his son. Shortly after the funeral, we discovered a true blessing in the son's locker. Amongst his

personal effects was a note that recorded the date when he had been baptized into Christ.

On the Sunday when the family was to receive their son's body at a ramp ceremony, the congregation processed into the cemetery to bless the new land and consecrate it for the burial of the saints. The family walked over from their farm house and met us there. In the previous days the father had often quoted the verse from the 30<sup>th</sup> psalm, "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning." Amazingly this turned out to be the psalm appointed as the Introit psalm for that Sunday! We prayed that psalm together and after blessing the land we prayed for the family. Then they made their way to a bus and we entered the church for the Divine Service.

The day of the funeral a group from the congregation gathered around the new opening in our fence. We tolled our church bell as the funeral procession passed. We solemnly watched as one of our nation's sons was laid to rest. After hearing the Last Post we stood in silence. That wonderful silent moment was broken by the honking of a pair of Canada Geese flying over the grave no more than twenty feet off the ground. As long as I live I will never forget that moment.

Few days go by where I do not look out into our backyard and see that grave stone. Every time I look at it I think of that soldier's sacrifice and what it cost his mom and dad next door. I am humbled by the price paid on my behalf and it always turns my mind to another Man who laid down His life for His friends. Through this terrible loss we had an opportunity to show the love of Christ to our neighbour and give a witness of that love to the world. We were deeply honoured to do it and thoroughly blessed in doing it.

On that lone black stone protruding from the snowdrifts in the back corner of the cemetery are two Canada Geese etched flying past a Canadian flag and in a semi-circle, the words from Psalm 30. Weeping may tarry for a night but in our Lord Jesus we know joy comes with the morning of His resurrection which, by His grace, we know is our resurrection also.

The words on the next page came to me one day as I looked out my window on that lone stone standing near our old maple tree. I thought of a soldier standing, watch after watch through the seasons, on guard for our country. His sacrifice blesses me as a Canadian but also as a Christian, as it stands as a perpetual reminder of another Son who stands guard by another tree for me.

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## A Son Stands on Guard

A son stands on guard  
By our great maple tree,  
A son stands on guard  
There for you and for me,  
A son stands on guard  
By our great maple tree.

As the leaves fall down  
From our great maple tree,  
As the leaves fall down  
In our land true and free,  
As the leaves fall down  
He's on guard by our tree.

As the snowflakes fall  
On our great maple tree,  
As the snowflakes fall  
On the north strong and free,  
As the snowflakes fall  
He's on guard by our tree.

As sap starts to run  
In our great maple tree,  
As sap starts to run  
In our home rising free,  
As sap starts to run  
He's on guard by our tree.

As leaves shade the ground  
'Neath our great maple tree,  
As leaves shade the ground  
Of our land growing free,  
As leaves shade the ground  
He's on guard by our tree.

He gave up his life  
For our great maple tree,  
He gave up his life  
Both for you and for me,  
He gave up his life  
To stand guard by our Tree.

Kurt E. Reinhardt

*Dedicated to the memory of MCpl Anthony Klumpenhouwer,  
a casualty of the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan,  
who is buried near an old maple tree in the small country cemetery of  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church near Kurtzville, Ontario.*

