

FUNERAL SERMON
FOR
David L. Neuhouser
April 7, 2015

A Life-Long Quest to Know and Reflect The Love of God

Beloved friends and family members: We are gathered together this morning to celebrate the life, homegoing, and Homecoming of David L. Neuhouser, who left this temporal phase of life on Wednesday, April 1, 2015.

David loved literature, and he loved wit, and if he were here to talk, he likely would find some meaning in the fact that he died on April Fool's Day—also known as joke day or hoax day—and was laid to rest on Resurrection weekend.

The idea that death is final is hoax, but Resurrection is the blessed hope—offering ultimate meaning. If David were here, perhaps he would cite John Donne's defiant and triumphant poem, "Death Be Not Proud." (Becky recite)

(Bill reads obituary)

When Martha Wenger called us Tuesday evening to tell us of David's passing, my first thought was "wow", part of me is dead also," I sensed this to a degree that I had never felt before. Perhaps that is because we had so much in common. Our ancestors included Anabaptists who had migrated from Switzerland to Alsace, France/Germany to northern Allen County, Indiana. Our fathers were preachers in that broad tradition. His college major was mathematics with a minor in history; mine was the same only in reverse. We were both married on August 18. We both were vitally involved in the early stages of the Upland Community Church and the Taylor

University Honors Program. We both were devoted fans of the Detroit Tigers and of the Abraham Lincoln period of history. And perhaps most significant of all and perhaps in imitation of the Inklings literary club of C.S. Lewis and his friends, we loved to gather with like-minded colleagues to engage in free-flowing discussion on books and ideas of ultimate significance.

David Neuhouser was a good man. He was the type of man described by another David, the psalmist, when he wrote:

The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord.
And He delights in his way.

Mark the blameless man and observe the upright
For the future of that man is peace. (Psalm 37: 21,37)

David would be embarrassed to have goodness attributed to him personally. But he would not be reticent about identifying with the idea of goodness. In fact his favorite poem, written by the 19th century American Quaker, John Greenleaf Whittier, is entitled, "The Eternal Goodness."

The titles and subjects of the books that David wrote or edited and the honors seminars that he taught suggest his personal values.

1. OPEN TO REASON and LOVE AND LOGIC tell of the importance he placed, especially early in life, upon a reasoned faith. C.S. Lewis and Elton Trueblood of Earlham College were models for him in this respect.

2. His two books on the ideas of George MacDonald reflect on how as he personally matured, his focus moved beyond a well reasoned faith to a deeply spiritual one. Here McDonald became his principal guide. Dave especially valued McDonald's emphasis on the love of God and the appropriateness of human obedience and humility. His favorite McDonald quotation was "God is easy to please but hard to satisfy."

3. Could I share with you three of my personal favorite McDonald quotations from over 500 that David has compiled? One has to do with the Neuhausner/McDonald emphasis on humility and the other two with the human relationship with God.

"What profits it to reason high
And in hard questions court dispute,
When thou dost lack humility,
Displeasing God at very root!"

B. (Secondly), on the human fear and love of God)

"Until love, which is the truth toward God, is able to cast out fear, it is well that fear should hold; it (meaning fear) is a bound (or bind) however poor,...that must be broken but...only by the tightening of an infinitely closer bond." (which namely of course is the bond of love).

C. (Finally)

"Little ones, no ill can chance;
Fear ye not, but sing and dance;
Though the high-heaved heaven should fall
God is plenty for us all:
God is Love and Strength."

Oh, just one more. Really not a quotation but a phrase, namely "the inscrutable love of God." What does that big

word mean? It declares the confidence that even if all else would change, the thing described, namely the love of God for us, never will change. Those who understand this can naturally express to their own children that “there is nothing which you could do to cause me to stop loving you.”

David’s learning was an incarnational learning. He sought to embody the best ideas that he studied and taught. Grandson Matthew Kreider observed that Dave did his best teaching by how he did his living, and that he did his best learning by his serving.

1. He taught and reflected humility, although not mindlessly so to authority. He could be an organizational leader but would be pleased not to be. Some of the church board meetings over which he presided were inefficiently long due to his commitment to due process. What he enjoyed was founding organizations to stimulate thoughtful conversation and then as soon as possible turn the administration of them over to someone else while he enjoyed being merely a regular participant.
2. He promoted the peace of the Prince of Peace as appropriate, but was also a peaceful man. Friend Roger Phillips said of him, “Dave was an oasis of peace in our torn world.”
3. He promoted social justice for oppressed groups and acted justly in his life. As one example, he taught from the books of John Perkins, community organizer of the poor in Mississippi, and also gave one of his sabbatical leaves to teaching in an historically Black college in Mississippi. Son Kevin has continued with this social justice emphasis in his life and career as a sociologist.

4. He taught the importance of community through books like Wendall Beery's JABER CROW and FIDELITY, and he practiced faithfulness in his family and the organizations of which he was a part.
5. He loved to teach and reflect on the idea of ultimate hope as expressed by C.S. Lewis in TILL WE HAVE FACES and Tolstoy's RESURRECTION, and he himself remained hopeful to the end as expressed in the words of his favorite hymn on which we will meditate at the end of the service.

Wife Ruth, who David called his best friend, also celebrated the idea of the blessed hope. A year or two ago when stopping by the Neuhouser home to leave something for Dave, Ruth stopped me to share something that she had just heard and which was very meaningful to her. I thought it profound. It is a three-point verse on this life and the next:

"Life is hard
God is merciful
Heaven is sure."

(Repeat)

Earlier this year, shortly after David and Ruth had returned from burying in close succession both a dear colleague and also his last remaining sibling, David told our book discussion club about a hymn from the Mennonite hymnal which had recently meant much to him. The hymn "Lift Your Glad Voices" speaks of the celebratory nature of the Good News of the Resurrection of first Jesus and then ourselves. Therefore, on our part, celebrating with gratitude both the life we have shared

with Dave and the life that we will share with him in eternal united fellowship with our Triune Creator, the One who made us out of His love, let us reflect together on the words of David's favorite hymn.

And now receive the benediction as given to us for this occasion by David himself:

Everlasting God,

You are our refuge and strength,
a helper close at hand, a shelter in time of need.

Help us, O God, to hear your words of comfort,
so that by faith our fears might be dispelled, our
loneliness eased,
and our hope revived.

May Your Holy Spirit carry us through our sorrow
Into the comfort of Your presence which endures
For all eternity.

In Jesus name. AMEN