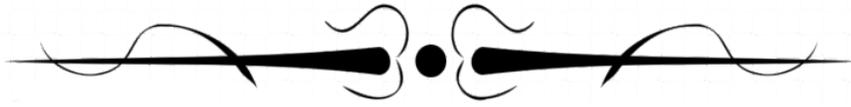


Duane C. Hoven



March 29, 1931 - December 24, 2020

Ann, Beth, John, Maren, family and friends, grace and peace to you from the one who lived for us, who died for us, and who now claims victory over every grave; Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

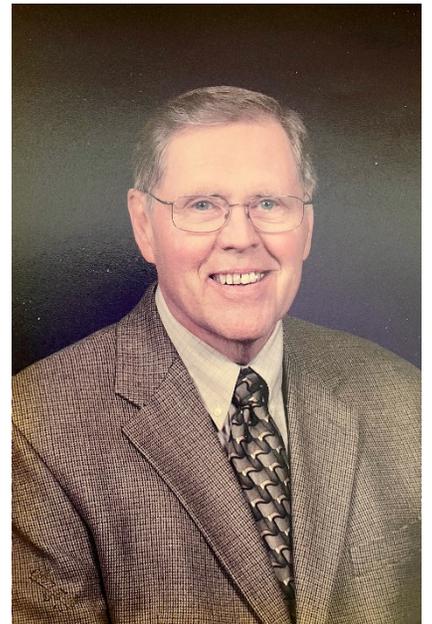
Back in the 50s and 60s, Pastor Alvin Rogness was president of Luther Seminary in St. Paul. Rogness was a strong pastor and a dynamic leader in the church. Yet, in a spirit of humility, he regularly deflected praise that came his way. His ministry was not about him, he would say, it was about God.

Rogness had a favorite story that he told over and over again. At the center of it was a man named Hans. Hans spent a lifetime working as a railroad section-hand. One day he died. They had his funeral. After the service, they went to the cemetery for the burial. As they were leaving the cemetery, a man who had worked with Hans for a number of years turned to a companion and said, "Hans had a great God." That was all. "Hans had a great God!"

Much like Hans, I think Alvin Rogness had a great God. And more to the point today, I think Duane Hoven had a great God too. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his.

Duane's belief in a great God was at the center of his life. Out of that center flowed the never-ending love of husband and father; the humble dedication of a pastor; a positive, encouraging spirit to so many of us who knew him. It didn't matter if you'd known Duane all of your life or just met him in the dining room at The Waters, a gracious spirit was evident in pretty much everything he did.

Duane's relationship with God grew out of humble beginnings, I suspect. He was born and raised in Zumbrota. He never tired of telling us that his hometown was the only Zumbrota in the whole world. Unlike many of us, Duane never completely left his hometown. When it came time for Duane to consider college, he was a bit intimidated. His dad had gone through only eighth grade; his mom through high school. Luther College seemed like a good choice. A number of Hovens had attended there. But Duane had friends in the area - Kenyon, Wanamingo. He'd met them at sporting events and Bible camp and Luther League. They were going to St. Olaf. Duane felt a tug to join them.



The next thing you know, Duane was an Ole. He was studying history, playing football, and jumping into all sorts of activities. He began making friends, not only from Kenyon and Wanamingo, but from all over Minnesota and the upper Midwest. A new building was coming to campus: Boe Memorial Chapel. Imagine the sorts of things that might happen in a place like that.

Duane was one of those students that gets up on Sunday morning and goes to church: St. John's Lutheran, in his case. It was only a few blocks from campus. Duane wrote in a journal - and with all the empathy he could muster - that he felt a little sorry for the female students heading to St. John's. They had to trudge up and down the hill in high heels. It was so perceptive of him to notice, don't you think? And there was another thing he noticed too: there was no place for Sunday morning worship on campus.

Duane had a great God. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Duane continued studying history and playing football. And yet, he always had an eye out for new opportunities. He became the first president of the St. Olaf Student Congregation. He got into college politics, running for Junior Class President and winning. And, along the way, he met a young woman named Ann Andersen from Neenah, Wisconsin. From what I've heard, Duane was quite taken with her. He said he was fortunate enough to get a few dates, but Ann had a very busy social calendar.

Duane had a great God. He spent one of his college summers in Europe. This was not common back in those days. I can't imagine what his parents said, but he wanted to experience things, meet people, explore cultures. When Duane arrived in Europe, he bought a small motorcycle. It had a top speed of 35 mph. He began traveling through Norway, Denmark, Austria, Germany, Italy, France, and England. Over 2½ months he put on close to 3600 miles. For those who are curious, that's 1636 kilometers.

One of Duane's goals that summer was to look up the Hoven family farm in Norway. They had no idea he was coming. Still, he knocked on the door. An older woman came to greet him. She didn't speak English, and his Norwegian wasn't all that good either. She was ready to close the door when Duane noticed a photo of his great-grandfather and family on the wall. Excitedly he named each one of them. Finally the woman understood. He was kin. A neighbor was found who could speak English. They had a delightful visit. She admitted that she thought Duane was a salesman selling, of all things, Danish milking machines. You can't be too careful with salesmen, you know.

Duane had a great God. He eventually returned to campus. He was thinking more and more about pastoral ministry. It just so happened that Ann Andersen from Neenah, Wisconsin had been selected as one of the finalists for homecoming queen. Ann was one of five. She needed an escort. Guess who she asked? Duane Hoven. "Wow!" Duane wrote in his journal. He quickly said yes before she could change her mind. Make a joyful noise to the Lord. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Their friendship would last much further than homecoming, of course. Two years later, Duane and Ann were married at the newly completed Boe Memorial Chapel. They were one of the first couples to be married there. And their wedding day? July 10. Sixty-seven years ago today.

Duane and Ann were soon off to St. Paul. Duane was starting at Luther Seminary. They had a new president at the seminary: Alvin Rogness. I wonder how long it took for Dr. Rogness to tell the story about Hans and his great God.

Duane hit his stride in seminary. After four years he was ordained a Lutheran pastor. He served in Dodgeville, Wisconsin; Wausau, Wisconsin; and Faribault, Minnesota. One congregation at a time, Duane honed his skills in preaching, teaching, leadership, and pastoral care. Duane greatly enjoyed being a pastor. He loved the people. I'm sure he stretched their thinking. The Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Children came into Duane and Ann's life: Beth, John, and Maren. Duane was a busy pastor, but he did his best to make time for the family. Beth remembers the fun of family vacations. They'd find a swimming pool. Dad would look the kids in the eye, disappear under the water, and then catch them in a scary and thrilling moment. John remembers his dad making reel-to-reel recordings of him playing the trombone. John was first chair. One concert he was featured in "Won't You Come Home, Bill Bailey." John admitted: "My performance was 'cringeworthy,' but dad had nothing but praise." Maren remembers her dad teaching her to cross-country ski in elementary school. As he grew up, he instilled in her a lifelong interest in foreign countries, languages, and people. Each of the children said that their dad gave them guidance and advice if they needed it, but mostly he was filled with encouragement and praise.

Duane had a great God! He was called to Zumbro in 1980 as Directing Pastor. There are any number of highlights from his time here: 1) Southeast Asian immigrants from Vietnam and Cambodia were searching for new beginnings in America. 2) Search Bible Study classes met on Monday night. 150 adults signed up. 3) Zumbro had ecumenical vespers on Reformation Sunday with the Catholics. 4) Episcopalians and Lutherans joined in worship. 5) Duane and Ann took trips to Papua New Guinea and taught high school students about Jesus. 6) There were visits to a church in China and to the Orthodox Church in Russia. Long before we at Zumbro adopted our current mission statement, Duane and Ann were living it. They were building bridges of understanding and peace, reaching out with compassion, and sharing the hope of Jesus.

One day last November I got a call from Duane. He wanted to come and see me. We sat in the newly renovated sanctuary. He hadn't seen it before, at least not in person. He expressed gratitude for the project, and the welcoming feel of the place. Then Duane handed me a letter. Without any advance notice - maybe a little like that trip to the farm in Norway - he said he'd written a letter to each of his former congregations. He was suddenly sounding very reflective.

The letter said: "My retirement from Zumbro was in 1993, twenty-seven years ago. Ann also retired at that time as ZLC Librarian." The letter continued: "God willing, I will reach the advanced age of 90 early in 2021. I want you to know that these retirement years have been rich and fulfilling for Ann and for me. We are so grateful for the continuing faithful, spirit-filled ministry that emanates from Zumbro. The future looks promising. It has been my joy and privilege to share the hope of Jesus with you."

There was more in the letter. We'll make copies and have it available on the website. It's addressed to the good people of Zumbro. At the end of our conversation, Duane shared a sad surprise. He had melanoma. And it had spread.

Early on Christmas Eve morning, I got a phone call. Duane was getting close to the end. I'd been to the apartment several times in the past few weeks. But now the end was imminent.

We read scripture and said prayers. Whether Duane was able to understand me fully or not, I thanked him for serving faithfully, for expanding our horizons, for loving much. Like so many before him, and whether we wanted the acclaim or not, Duane had spent a lifetime bearing witness to a great God.

I closed with the prayer we had planned for Christmas Eve worship later that day. It seemed especially fitting: "Almighty God, you have made this holy night shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant there here on earth we may walk in the light of Jesus' presence, and in the last day wake to the brightness of his glory; through your only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Pastor Vern Christopherson
July 10, 2021