

Funeral for Douglas Van Neste
September 10, 2009

Thank you all for coming. There are people here from so many different phases of Doug's life. Family, friends of our parents from the time we were born, teachers & friends from our school days, college friends, friends from his 'grown-up years', and students of his. We come today to remember and celebrate a life that impacted many, to share our grief and to look together to God who is our hope and comfort.

Memories

Many of us could share stories about Doug, and it is good to share these memories, reminding us of all we enjoyed. As a brother, I have more than my share of stories to tell. ☺ Being close in age we did a lot of playing together, from corkball, baseball or football in the front yard, to re-enacting the Revolutionary War in the woods behind our house. Our early children's pictures almost always show him with his arm around me or on my head, in mind taking care of me almost like a mother. Even 'til now he would typically greet me as, "Little brother"- and in size as well as age I always was. ☺

Now the Bible says a brother is born for adversity, and we had our share of scraps as well. I remember in particular a basketball game gone awry, that led to some punches, broken glasses, and eventually a good spanking I received from my Dad. Dad always won the fights. ☺

I also remember that he was a teacher by nature. The nurturing aspect I already mentioned played into that. Then, he always loved to learn and to share what he learned with others. When we were in elementary, after classes just about each day he would tell me what he learned. I distinctly remember sitting in math lessons thinking, "Doug already taught me that." Folks thought I caught on fairly quick, but the truth is I had already been introduced to many things ahead of time.

I like to think I also contributed to his schooling. I remember when he started kindergarten and I was still staying home. One morning he decided he did not want to go and he hid under his bed. When my parents came looking for him I dutifully revealed his hiding place so he went on to school. I am sure that helped in some small way. ☺

Also this week, it came back to me various talks we had in high school about pressures and fickle friends. We had different circles in some ways, but there was a clear realization between us that we could depend on each other.

He honored me by asking me to be his best man at his wedding. It seems fitting, then, that I now serve him in this way.

You also have stories. Many here today are his students, and a good number of students have posted comments on how much they appreciated Doug. Here are some of the comments:

He was truly a great man. he would teach his students everything they needed to know about that course. He would say hi or good morning to you even if he didnt know who you were.

Mr. Doug VanNeste was a great man and a even better teacher.
he was such a sweet man, ... he always spoke to me and picked on me

he was VERY understanding. i remember he used to pick on me

Mr. Van Neste was the Best Teacher. I really like World history when i got put in his class. He is My Favorite Teacher.

Mr. Van Neste was my hero.

He was one of my favorite teachers. He knew how to keep our attention.

Mr. VanNeste was a great man. He was always so supportive of my educational pursuits. He would always greet me with a hug ... and tell me how proud he was!

He was an amazing man. He didn't care who you were, he would say hi to you or tell you good morning whenever he saw you

Van Neste was an awesome teacher. He always had a smile on his face

I loved going to his class because he was always happy. He is one of the best teachers i have ever had

People commented on a ready smile, care, and even phone calls during hard times. Doug always had a special care for those who are often overlooked, or those in specific need. Many of you know that very well.

It is encouraging to me and I know it is to the rest of the family to know of the impact he had on others. It makes us proud. It brings us joy. And, honestly, it also reminds us of our loss.

Grief/Comfort

There is no way around it. This is a difficult time. None of us expected to be here a week ago. But one truth Doug was passionate about was the sovereignty of God. He would remind us that God is in control, that though all of this is a shock to us, it is not to God. God is still in control, and He is working even this for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

We need to be reminded though that death is an enemy. That within us which cries out, “No! This is not right!” - that feeling is correct. Death is not part of the original design. It is here only because of the Fall. 1 Cor 15 is clear in calling death an enemy. It is ok to hate it. But we hate in hope. Because Christ in his death and resurrection has defeated this enemy making it his servant so that now its worst sting can only take Christ’s servants home.

Because we believe- Doug believed- that “The word of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul” I wanted to share several lines from the Psalms with you today as they speak to our situation. These Scriptures remind us that God knows we hurt; He knows we get confused and scared. We don’t have to hide these facts. He is big enough to handle our anxiety and our questions. The Psalms give us words for expressing grief, and in the midst of the grief finding hope in the character of God.

142:1 With my voice I cry out to the LORD;
with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD.

2 I pour out my complaint before him;
I tell my trouble before him.

3 When my spirit faints within me,
you know my way!

...

5 I cry to you, O LORD;
I say, “You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living.”

6 Attend to my cry,
for I am brought very low!

38:8 I am feeble and crushed;
I groan because of the tumult of my heart.

9 O Lord, all my longing is before you;
my sighing is not hidden from you.

10 My heart throbs; my strength fails me,
and the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me.

...

15 But for you, O LORD, do I wait;
it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer. ...

17 For I am ready to fall,
and my pain is ever before me. ...

21 Do not forsake me, O LORD!
O my God, be not far from me!

22 Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!

143:4 my spirit faints within me;
my heart within me is appalled.

5 I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all that you have done;

I ponder the work of your hands.
6 I stretch out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. *Selah*
7 Answer me quickly, O LORD!
My spirit fails!

...

8 Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love,
for in you I trust.
Make me know the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.

17:8 Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings,
22:11 Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.
22:19 But you, O LORD, do not be far off!
O you my help, come quickly to my aid!
34:4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.

73:23 [You, O Lord, are continually with me];
you hold my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.
25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

40:1 I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
2 He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
3 He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the LORD.

46:1 God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

11 The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Doug loved the truths concerning the greatness and majesty of God. His old journals & poems, as well as his conversations with me were filled with references to such truths. It is to this great and awesome God we now look. He understands when we do not. He is able when we are not. We can trust him and rest in him.

Gospel

If you knew Doug, you know he liked to talk. ☺ He liked to talk about almost anything! And he knew something about almost anything! But one of his favorite topics was theology. He read and thought a lot about what the Bible teaches. He often stressed the importance of knowing what you believe and why you believe it. He was also keen to root his faith in the understanding of the church through the ages. This is why he had his family recite and learn the Apostles' Creed, the earliest summary of the Christian faith outside of the Scripture. This summary meant a lot to him, and no doubt Doug talked to many of you about the faith, even urging you to trust Christ. I would like to read here this summary of the faith which Doug professed.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell: The third day he rose again from the dead: He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty: From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead:

I believe in the Holy Ghost: the holy catholic church: the communion of saints: The forgiveness of sins: The resurrection of the body: And the life everlasting. Amen

This faith is where Doug placed his hope. The statements of hope I read earlier apply only to those who have repented of their sins and placed their faith in Jesus Christ who died for our sins and was raised for our justification.

Doug & I talked about the importance of the gospel being preached at funerals. At these times we are often more aware of our frailty and the reality of eternity than at any other time. And we need to realize that we are not naturally on right terms with God. We are separated from God by our sin.

[Preach Gospel]

So, what about you? Have you repented of your sins and trusted in Christ alone for your salvation? Some of you students- you have heard Doug explain this gospel and even heard him call upon you to believe. Will you now believe?

For those who do not know Christ my closing call to you is, “Repent and believe. Find life.”

Family, and those who know Christ, I leave you with this Scriptural prayer/blessing:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Rom 15:13)