

LOVE That Loves Us

Margaret Feldmann Kruizenga Memorial

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8, 11, 13; I John 4: 7-8, 12, 16, 19; John 1:1-5, 14, 18

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It is an honor and my privilege to conduct this service of worship and celebration of the life of Margaret Feldmann Kruizenga. I do so as family as much as pastor. When Margaret married Richard she married into a family of Mulders and Kruizengas who were, with a couple of other families, the core of the First Reformed Church of Spring Lake, Michigan. Dick's parents were baptized on the same day in the First Reformed Church of Spring Lake and, I'm told, Dick's father winked at his mother across the baptismal font and said, "She's for me!" The tradition was also Margaret's, coming, as she did, from Long Island and a Reformed congregation there which steered her to Hope College where she met her husband to be, a marriage of over 60 years.

I mention my presence as family because, graduating from Western Seminary in 1960, I was extended a call to the Spring Lake congregation. In the first congregational meeting I ever conducted in the fall of 1960, Dick's father, Richard J. Kruizenga, was elected once again an elder and proved an early formative influence on me. After a hiatus of seven years, having left for New Jersey and then Europe for post-graduate work, I returned for a visit with a very painful divorce ahead. Dick's father, with consummate skill, succeeded in leading the congregation to extend a call to me even in the tenuous circumstances of my life at that time. In 1971 I began again in Spring Lake and from that time Dick's father became a surrogate father to me.

And in that almost impossible situation of assuming the pastorate of that fine congregation, divorcing with children 7, 9 and 11 for whom to care, it was primarily Dick's sister Dorothy and her husband Gordon who "adopted" us and made it all possible. (Gordon is present with us; Dorothy died on the past New Year's Day.)

I relate this history because I want you to sense the personal meaning of this celebration to me. Over many years, Dick and Margaret would return to Spring Lake. I met them but didn't really know them well until, in retirement, they were summer residents of Spring Lake and Grand Haven. Over these last years we have shared many happy occasions with them and were privileged to come to know their family.

From that history it is obvious that I did not know the Margaret Dick fell in love with, married and eventually traveled the world with. Even in retirement Margaret's strength (She was no shrinking flower!), intelligence and acute engagement with current events were clear. She held strong opinions and was not reticent about expressing them. A time or two she straightened me out!

But one comment in the Funeral Home Obituary Internet Site caught my eye and I determined I would share it with you because in brief, concise fashion I suspect Margaret could not receive a finer portrait. Her friend Nancy wrote:

Margaret was a dear friend for many, many years – and remained so from all corners of the world. I met her when I was just out of college and she was a sophisticated New York wife, mother and world traveler. I always admired and looked up to her for her great taste, wit, intelligence and generosity. My love and thoughts are with her wonderful husband Dick and with Meg, Derek and families. Margaret will always have a special place in my heart.

That is the one whose life we celebrate today – and yesterday – at the Ground Breaking for the Kruizenga Art Museum on Hope's campus.

My first serious encounter with Dick and Margaret was many years ago at the Spring Lake cemetery – a graveside service for their child Dwight, a special needs child. In her determined fashion, Margaret sought every possible means to give Dwight a normal childhood but ran into a wall; nothing in science, medicine or technology could bring her child to wholeness. I think it was at that critical juncture that she found in Christian Science spiritual resources that enabled her to cope with human impotence in face of deep human need.

Her spiritual quest became her lifelong pursuit. She was serious, engaged and generous in her support of the Church of Christ, Scientist where she found a spiritual community. Through her leadership and support, the church in Irving, Texas, was transformed into a beautiful sacred space and she was very supportive of the church in Grand Haven as well.

Margaret was seriously engaged in the spiritual quest for meaning, indeed, for the Sacred Mystery we call God. In the teaching of Christian Science she was pointed to God as Spirit, Mind, Love and the critical importance of prayer and meditation.

The Scripture Lessons were chosen in light of Margaret's spiritual quest. The familiar poetry of Ecclesiastes 3 moves to

God has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

One whose knowledge of Hebrew far surpasses mine has rendered those lines thus:

God has made everything beautiful in its own time and has put an eternal yearning in our hearts even as we live before the face of Mystery.

An eternal yearning before the face of Mystery – my sense is that that might fit Margaret well. It is my sense that in her spiritual pursuit she came to rest in the God of Love – a central biblical teaching underscored in Christian Science – Divine Love come to expression in the life of Jesus.

“No one has ever seen God,” declares the writer of the Fourth Gospel in his prologue to his story of Jesus decades after the event itself. But the eternal Word, Creation’s Agent, assumed flesh – humanity – and in that human face, the writer claims, God is revealed. Out of that Johannine Circle, also near the end of the first century as the early Christian community was trying to give expression to the Gospel, the writer of the First Letter of John picked up that statement from the Gospel – “No one has seen God.” For him as for the Gospel writer, the Mystery of God was revealed in Jesus. He opens his letter:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.

But then later in the letter he calls the community to love one another for “God is love.” He then repeats the acknowledgement of the Gospel – No one has ever seen God.” But he goes on to make a startling claim –

If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

He moves beyond the Gospel’s claim that God is revealed in Jesus – the Word made flesh – to the amazing claim that God is revealed in our love one for another.

If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

God is Love, Love known and experienced in our human love. The Hebrew poet sensed an eternal yearning as he lived before the face of Mystery. The writer of the First Letter of John read off the story of Jesus that God is Love. But not only that; God/LOVE is known/experienced in the concreteness of human love – as we love one another.

The human quest for meaning, for some understanding of the mystery of being human, our whence, our whither, and what it means in the meantime is both ancient and contemporary.

One of the greatest film directors of our time is Terrence Malick. He produced *The Thin Red Line* and more recently a film entitled *The Tree of Life* – a deeply spiritual film starring Brad Pitt and Jessica Chastain. But last month *To the Wonder* came out, a film in which Malick reveals the deep human hunger and quest for what ultimately grounds us, forms us, calls us to communion. A reviewer writes,

Ultimately, for Malick, the experience of falling in love grants us a glimpse of the divine – of a ‘LOVE that loves us.’

Humanity was made for God. And He is present all around us – in the transfiguring, wondrous joy of romantic love, in self-giving sacrifice, in our suffering and the suffering of others, in the charity we offer to those in pain, in the resplendent beauty of the natural world – if only we open our eyes to see Him. That, it seems, is Terrence Malick’s scandalous message....an ecstatic tribute to God. (Damon Linker)

The film’s title says it all – “To the Wonder.” I find it fascinating that one of our contemporary film directors should with such artistry cause us to wonder – wonder about the Wonder that is God.

In a three-way e-mail conversation in which I engage and, in this instance, about Malick’s “To the Wonder,” one wrote:

In this context it makes a lot of sense to me that in wanting to speak redemptively about what grounds us in all that we are Malick wrestles with love as Love. In being Loved I know God and in loving I walk with God (Hendrick Hart)

I entitled my meditation the LOVE that Loves Us – loves us into being, undergirds, overshadows ‘til finally we move through death to Eternal Light dwelling in the LOVE that loved us into being!

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

Margaret believed that. In her final barely conscious moments she was bathed in it. I stood vigil with Dick. I witnessed his deep love in a final embrace and “I love you,” as well as the heavy grief he felt. Dick violated the Kruizenga canon against showing emotion! It was quite beautiful, moving. God is Love. LOVE loved her into being.

Margaret believed that.

Now she knows.