



It is more than safe to say that our Covenant family has lost one of its strongest pillars in Alex Hohenstein. Not just with his however many years of service on committees and being a lector and whatever else, but his all-around support and passion for this place, for this people. And yet, even the strongest pillars need support in order to stand. I still remember a couple years ago after a worship on Sunday morning. Alex made his way towards me with the bulletin in hand. And although I did not get to know Alex in the prime of his life, including for all the years of his immense variety of service in this congregation, I still knew Alex was a details-oriented man, noticing anything

that was ever so slightly wrong with this building, for starters. So, I figured I must have missed some detail in those pieces of paper he was holding. Instead, Alex pointed to the blessing that was spoken at the end of the worship.

Now, the blessing is something that can be easily overlooked by most...normal people. The normal people who wouldn't mind just getting straight to singing the final hymn and going on about their way to brunch or getting ready for the Browns game or whatever else was on their to-do list to finish off the weekend. But, Alex...wasn't normal. He not only paid attention to the details in electronics and engineering and church buildings. He paid attention to the holy details, too. So, he pointed to that blessing, and he was holding back tears, saying, "We need to hear more of this!" The blessing was taken from the words of Romans: "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus." And so the blessing concluded, "God, the creator, Jesus, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the comforter, bless you and keep you in eternal love." "We need to hear more of that," our beloved emotionally-charged Alex said. Because, evidently, even the strongest of pillars need support in order to stand.

It was about that time that Alex was starting to endure his fair share of medical complications with seemingly no end in sight with doctor appointments and skin care treatments. And with not just being a details-oriented individual, but also a results-driven insistence about him, there may have been a bit of frustration on his part by then. Nevertheless, for some reason he found a bit of Gospel, a bit of most soothing news to his soul with that blessing. Words that he must have heard before from Romans. Words that he must have spoken himself from that lectern many times, but sometimes the best of stories are the ones that never get old to hear. And for Alex, to know that nothing could separate him from God's love: no pain, no frustration, even the times when he did not feel like much of a strong pillar at all; none of it could separate him from God's love in Jesus Christ. That most incredible story of God's relentless admiration for Alex never got too old to hear.

Of course, Alex was the expert on telling the stories that never got too old to hear. Being the details-oriented man certainly helped in being that gifted story-teller, along with his results-driven insistence to make sure we experienced joy and laughter into the countless times we shared with him. So yes, those stories that if we got ourselves going could keep us here all the way through this upcoming Sunday morning and beyond. The stories of infinite fishing trips with David and his grandsons and Bob Franz and Don Schirmer and Keary Knerem, among numerous others. The stories of treasured times spent in Trumbull County with Ruth or vacations up to Cananda or down to Florida.

Except, the best one of all remains when he was in Germany, serving in the Army. He had coordinated schedules with this young woman he first met on a blind date in Valparaiso; to meet her, this time, on the other side of the pond. He left the base, which he wasn't supposed to do. He rented a car, which he wasn't supposed to do. Except Alex had made a spur of the moment decision to spend an entire month's salary on getting the ring for his precious Paula. He just couldn't let her go, because, well...even the strongest of pillars need the best of support to stand. And so many times in recent years, when Paula went above and beyond in caring for her husband, over and over again, Alex would hold back tears in saying how amazingly blessed he was to have her as his wife for over sixty years.

And so, Paula, your Covenant family most certainly grieves with you this day, and we cling just as tightly to the Resurrection promise, that your and your family's beloved Alex remains in the care of our ultimate foundation in Jesus Christ. We will be here for you in whatever way we can going forward, but we also know you are surrounded by a most wonderful family in David and Ruth and Mike and Sheri along with Joshua, Michael, Alex, and Zachary. And just so all of you of the Hohenstein family know, whenever he spoke of any of you, he did so with such tremendous pride, with such a glow about him no matter what he was enduring physically. In fact, only a couple weeks ago, when he was facing a fair share of uncertainty, when he brought up his great-grandson in Liam, at 5 months young, Alex's face lit up, as if he could brighten all of northeast Ohio; as if no pain whatsoever could stop him from experiencing the most soothing love. Such stories of all of you never got old to hear, because that is when we saw Alex at his absolute height.

So, yes, some stories just never get old to hear, including the Gospel itself. We spoke that blessing that Alex adored at the end of worship for several weeks, and I think Alex got to me, too, because those words have been spoken from the pulpit rather frequently since. Yes, Alex was a pillar of strength in many ways for us, but even the strongest of pillars need support to be able to stand. But I have a feeling that Alex would be the first one to tell all of us that today we are not ultimately gathered because of him, but because of the church's and all of our foundation in Jesus Christ our Lord. The foundation that insists on remaining beneath and within and around us, no matter what, with all the love to sustain us throughout a lifetime and beyond. And if the church doesn't tell you that enough, then hopefully Alex's holy insistence will never let us forget it: there is absolutely nothing that will happen in your life to separate you from God's love in Jesus Christ: no mistake made, no disease contracted, no level of frustration or anger, not even death; absolutely nothing will ever happen to separate you from God's love in Jesus Christ, our Lord. And for that Greatest News that will never get too old to hear for Alex and all of us, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!