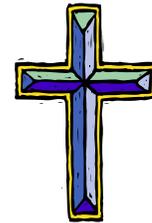


EULOGY
FOR THE
MEMORIAL SERVICE
OF
DAVID LEON AGARD



SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 2017
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK

EULOGY
FOR
DAVID LEON AGARD
PASSED ON JANUARY 20, 2017

BY
THE REV. DR. ARTHUR M. SUGGS

IMPORTANT NOTE TO READER: This job was printed in two-column folio format. Thus, the pages are not in ordinary sequence. To read the text, STRICTLY FOLLOW THE PAGE NUMBERS. DO NOT FOLLOW THE PAGE SEQUENCE.

Good afternoon to all of you, and from the bottom of my heart, thank you for being here on behalf of the Agard family. Our purpose is twofold: One is to remember, and the second is to give thanks to God for David's life and the way in which his life has enriched all of us.

Let me say first to the family that you do me a great honor of allowing me this privilege.

I need to say right off that David had his funeral wishes on file, and he did this nearly twenty-five years ago. I didn't know about it, but I looked at them yesterday to find out what his wishes were. He had requested nearly five pages of prayers, seven scripture readings, and thirteen musical selections, including two full masses.

It was only a day ago that I learned David's middle name. I knew him simply as David, and I learned that his first name is of course kingly. His middle name is Leon, which means "lion," so we have David, the lion. He was a member of this church for sixty-six years and was married to Dubbie, the love of his life, for fifty-four years.

I'm going to assume that you've read the obituary in the paper with its description of what he has done.

I'd like to tell you a bit about the man I knew: First and foremost, at least for me personally, he was a loyal friend. I won't go into any details, but I need to acknowledge publicly that I wouldn't be here if it weren't for him. He paved the way for me to become pastor of this church and enabled me to have a successful pastorate here. I owe him that, and I want to say thank-you to him.

In my opinion, in a number of ways David was a genius in his playing, in his conducting, and in his composing. Who knows how many pieces of music he had memorized? He was truly gifted. There's a difference between knowing something and understanding something. You can know somebody, know their name, where they live, that kind of thing, and there is understanding people. He both knew music and understood music. He was a genius.

One of the most remarkable characteristics about David is that, for all of us, if you take a person, and here you are, and there's your goal. Here's what you want to have happen, here's what you want to do, here's what you want to accomplish. And over here is you, and in the middle, there are obstacles for all of us. You all know where I'm going with this.

He didn't let obstacles get in his way. He was amazing at

what cannot be seen is eternal." (II Corinthians 4: 16-18.)

And so we mourn the loss of the physical presence of David, but he is transitioning into the light.

I'd like to conclude with two thoughts to share:

The first one is for David, who dealt with medical issues for so long, yet he was always incredibly brave and positive and downright stubborn in facing those issues. And so a quote from Shakespeare, found in Julius Caesar:

"A coward dies a thousand times before his death,
but the valiant taste of death but once."

And then the second thought is for Dubbie, something you already know:

The sweetest sound is not when two sing the same
note but when two sing different notes in
harmony.

So David Leon Agard, child of God, made in the image and likeness of God, rest in peace.

Amen.

Once again on those hospital visits, most of all, we would talk about theology. In my opinion, one of the better definitions I know of for a human being is that of a specific singular entity at interplay with the infinite.

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Because we would discuss John 17, where it talks about the kingdom of heaven being within us. And then in the Book of Acts 17, the way in which it seems to say almost exactly the opposite, that “In God we live and move and have our being.”

Well, which is it? But it’s this interplay of spirit within us and ourselves living within spirit. God within us, and living within God.

We talked about the metaphors, as a human being, being a child of God. So you have this familial metaphor: parents — kids; God — human beings. About human beings being the temple of God. About human beings being part of one body, of being created in the image and likeness of God. And for goodness’ sakes, what can that possibly mean?

So therefore, a human being is a specific singular entity at interplay with the infinite. And so we are spirit, we are a soul with a body. And so putting off the body doesn’t harm the spirit. The demise of our bodies is utterly harmless to the soul.

“So therefore, we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, and our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but

torpedoing them and blowing them apart or finding a way over or around or underneath. But if here he was and there’s his goal, he found a way. And I very much admired him for that. Fewer torpedoes, maybe, but I thought highly of that in him.

He was what we call a Type A personality, maybe double-A, A-squared, something along those lines. He was driven, forceful, and sometimes intimidating. However, I want to temper that feeling in that I found him to be consummately rational. He had a mind that was formidable.

And if you made a decent argument against something that he wanted to do, he would stop. I saw this twice in my time with him. And once, if there was something that he didn’t want to do, and you made a rational argument to do it, he got on board. I saw that once.

David was the cofounder and the music director of the BC Pops from 1974 until 1998. That’s probably the singular thing that he is most noted for, and it’s hard to measure the effect that had on the musical life of our community.

Here’s a portion of an email that I received yesterday. This is from Ethelyn Enos:

“I’ll never forget my father’s joy after attending the Pops on the River, July Fourth, 1988. Mom and dad came to the Binghamton community only six months before this event. Dad’s eyes were wide open as he told me that he and mom took their lawn chairs and got to hear music and experience fireworks like never before.

“My parents both felt like this community had so much to offer. They went on to believe that gifts of talent, generosity and hard work, and passion for people were the backbone and foundation of their new home.

“Little did they know that they would meet the maestro of that July Fourth event at First Congregational Church, just a stone’s throw from the Pops on the River. Mom and dad shook his hand with such appreciation. And I couldn’t help but hear dad say, ‘Boy, did I enjoy that music! You can sweat like a son of a gun!’ ”

What drives a person to bring a community immense joy with such passion for music and people? A gentle giant, determined to make a difference for everyone he serves. That’s David Agard.

With all those personality traits, I hope I was kind.

David had great passion for people and music and the church and theology. But his primary love was for Dubbie, a deep and profound love. I visited him one night, rather late at night, at Wilson Hospital, and he was ranting about something. I don’t know what it was; this was years ago.

But he was ranting away, and when he stopped to catch his breath, I remarked to him, “David, it strikes me that at times you might be hard to live with.”

He stopped for a moment. He actually hung his head a bit, and you will see the train of thought here. His next words were, and I quote:

“Isn’t Dubbie great?”

He did have an understanding that he might be hard to live with. And so he not only loved you; he also appreciated you. And in the words of the old vows, he cherished you.

And he also told me how thankful he was that many years ago, the two of you crossed your paths.

David also loved his family — Amy and Rob, Michael, Matthew, and Timothy. For me, visiting him once again in the hospital, where I would ask, “How’s the family? And I would hear about Amy and Rob — again. “How are the kids?” How are the boys?” And I would hear about the boys — again. He was proud of you guys.

He was prideful of the way in which you are making your way in the world. He told me step-by-step what each of you was up to. What you were accomplishing, what your goals were. He was deeply proud of you and loved you. I hope you have a sense of that as you grow up and miss him.

He also loved God, and perhaps even more than God, he loved the church. He was a consummate churchman, and he loved theology. He gave the gifts of music and wisdom and leadership to the church.

Here, at this congregation, a number of years ago, we awarded him the title of Deacon Emeritus for life. Being a deacon here is one of the highest positions you can have in the leadership of this denomination, and we awarded him that honor as profound thanks for what he had done in leadership at this church.

And so, in David’s honor, I also want to do just a little bit of theology. I know this probably isn’t the best teachable moment, but work with me here.

