

# “Dene”

Isaiah 25:6-9; Luke 1:46-55; Revelation 21:1-7

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From the Pulpit

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A memorial meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Senior Minister, First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, October 6, 2024, 5:00pm service of Evensong, dedicated to the memory of George Dene Barnard and always to the glory of God!

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*Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock, and our salvation.  
Amen.*

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The resonance of salvation and the hope of eternal life sing out in the texts of Isaiah and Revelation. And come to us with a new voice from Mary. This is Good news.

The prophet Isaiah tells us that the God of our ancestors and the God of all humankind will meet us, feed us, be just and compassionate to us and will, in the end, swallow up death forever when heaven and earth embrace. This promise is not for a few people somewhere – but for all people everywhere. Isaiah’s promise is given to the entire human race. On a holy mountain, on the day of God’s choosing, God will be there. And God will wipe away “the tears from all faces, and will wipe away the disgrace of all God’s people.” God will save us all when God determines the time, the place, and all the particulars of God’s saving plan. God will save us.

Most of the Book of Revelation is an experience of wilderness, wild events, unfamiliar imagery and bewildering characters. The first 20 chapters offer travelers little rest and comfort. While graphic and musical artists love the vibrant imagery and the wild things of John's revelation, because of the colorful cosmic creativity, most experience these visions as strange and bizarre.

Then, like a bow arriving after a rainstorm, the 21st chapter of Revelation 21 greets us. And the 21st chapter shines light and hope break forth in the simplicity and clarity of the words, "behold the Holy City, a New Jerusalem coming down from heaven like a bride adorned for her husband." And the voice from the heaven declares that God's place is among mortals. God will come down and be with us. God will wipe away our tears, just as Isaiah had promised. And God's arrival will mean that mourning has passed away. Crying and pain have ended. God will make ALL THINGS NEW. We are reassured further as these words are delivered from the throne of God: "*I make all things new,*" thus says the Lord. The one who is the beginning and the end – the Alpha and the Omega – offers water from the spring of life and the promise of eternal homecoming.

Isaiah and Revelation meet Mary in her song of praise. And the Prophet of Jewish Scripture and the Prophets of Christian Scripture offer a vision of the end of death and the beginning of eternal life. They show us life beyond the pain and grief; pointing beyond the tears and anguish, and pointing beyond this place and this time.

Do you hear these words? Do they resonate in your soul? Through the music of the spheres and the language of angels, do you get this? Does it land in you and make a home in you?

These are the words of God for the people of God for today. Let them reside in you in such a way that they change you – that they become one in you

as they seek to become one with you. They point us to no less than eternal salvation. Do not miss their arrival and their call into our hearts and minds. Throughout his lifetime, George Dene Barnard gave us many gifts. He did in many ways. He shared his musical gifts and talents as teacher, a choral director, and an organist. He of gave us the gift of love, the gift of friendship. He gifted us with bawdy humor, an impish smile and hardy laughter. He shared his passion for excellence and his zeal for perfection with all of us – all the time.

But, more than anything else, Dene received and shared a vision of salvation in his own musically prophetic and powerful way. He received music that transformed, and he gave it back to us in transformational ways. He received a vision of eternity transposed to paper from the hearts and minds of the musical geniuses of the ages and called forth our better angels to receive these notes of salvation – to hear them, to sing them, to share them, to own them. Like an electric wire that connects one source of power with another, Dene was a conduit for God of that is beautiful – all that connects heaven to earth. His music made us sigh in awe and cry with an overwhelming sense of delight and splendor.

Dene Barnard was a profound human being. For those of you who were blessed to know him before his 51 years in Columbus, you knew this better than the rest of us. And for those of us who have come to know him, at various stages, over the last 51 years, we saw this, too. He often masked his profundity with humor, but make no mistake about it – he was an absolute genius, and he was genuinely one of God's greatest gifts to each of us – musically and more.

Dene's stories, his jokes, his pronouncements, his music, his presence will be with us forever – and each of us has a piece of that story that we will always carry with us. But, always remember this – his brilliant life was designed in such a way that he, like Johan Sebastian Bach, gave everything he had to us – and then, returned it all to God. Let us do the same. Like Bach and Barnard,

two names that will always be together forever, may we give all the glory to God! Amen.