

Clark University

Clark Digital Commons

Funeral, 1953 and After

Earl Clement Davis Papers

5-21-1953

Funeral Service for Earl Clement Davis

Charles Edwards Park

Petersham First Parish Unitarian Church

Earle R. Steeves

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.clarku.edu/funeral>

SERVICE FOR EARL C. DAVIS

Music, including Largo from Dvorak's New World Symphony.

Rev. Earle R. Steeves:

It must be so, Plato. Thou reasonest well. Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire, this longing after immortality? Or whence this secret dread and inward horror of falling into naught? Why shrinks the soul back on herself, and startles at destruction? 'Tis the divinity that stirs within us. 'Tis Heaven itself that points out an hereafter, and intimates eternity to man. (Addison)

Eternal God, Our Heavenly Father, who lovest us with an everlasting love, and canst turn the shadow of death into the morning, help us now to wait upon thee with reverence and lifted hearts. In the silence of this hour, speak to us of eternal things that through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we may hope and be lifted above our darkness and distress into the light of peace and thy presence. Amen.

And this selection.... read at this time of year in this pulpit by our good friend and brother:

The Rhodora -- on being asked whence this flower

In May, when seawinds pierce our solitudes,
I found the fresh rhodora in the woods,
Spreading its leafless bloom in the damp nook
To please the desert and the sluggish brook.
The purple petals fallen in the pool
Make the black waters, with its beauty, gay.
Here might the red bird come his plumes to cool,
And court the flower that cheapens his array.
Rhodora, if the sages ask thee
Why this charm is wasted on the earth and sky,
Tell them, dear, if eyes were made for seeing,
Then beauty is its own excuse for being.

Why thou wert there, O rival of the rose,
 I never thought to ask, I never knew;
 But in my simple ignorance suppose
 The selfsame power that brought me there
 Brought you.

(Emerson)

And then this very simple poem; and from my point of view it is
 so pat:

Life is so sweet because of the friends we have made,
 And the things that in common we share;
 We want to live on, not because of ourselves,
 Not because of the people who care.
 It is giving and doing for somebody else --
 Upon that Life's splendor depends;
 And the joy of the world, when we sum it all up,
 I find, is the making of friends.

I'd like to think when life is done
 That I had filled a needed post.
 That here and there I'd paid my fare
 With more than idle talk and boast.
 That I had taken gifts divine,
 The breath of life and manhood fine,
 And tried to use them now and then
 In service for my fellow men.

(Anonymous)

Lord, thou has searched me and known me.
 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising.
 Thou understandest my thought afar off.
 Thou compasseth my path and my lying down
 And art acquainted with all my ways.
 For there is not a word in my tongue
 But lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.
 Thou has beset me behind and before,
 And laid thine hand upon me.
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 It is high; I cannot attain unto it.
 Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
 Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there;
 If I make my bed in the grave, behold, thou art there.
 If I take the wings of the morning
 And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
 Even there shall thy hand lead me,
 And thy right hand shall hold me.
 If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me
 Even the night shall be light about me.
 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee
 But the night shineth as the day.
 The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.
 I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
 Marvellous are thy works,
 And that my soul knoweth right well.
 How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God.
 How great is the sum of them.
 If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.
 When I awake, I am still with thee.
 Search me, O God, and know my heart.
 Try me, and know my thoughts,
 And see if there be any wicked way in me
 And lead me into life everlasting.

(Psalm 139)

This little passage of scripture our good friend used to say came to him a great deal

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find;
 knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh, receiveth;
 And he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.

For what man is there of you who, if his son ask for bread, will give him a stone; or if he shall ask for fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good gifts to them that ask him? Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets.

And then this concluding bit of scripture.....

Eye hath not seen nor ear heard

Neither have entered into the heart of man

The things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

But God has revealed unto us all his spirit; for the spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For which cause we faint not, for though our outward man perish, yet the inward is renewed day by day, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. If God is for us, who can be against us? May, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

May God bless the reading of his word.

Music.

Rev. Charles E. Park:

My friends, it is a very sober privilege to talk about Mr. Davis, and a very formidable one. There are many things to say. If a man could have all the time that he wanted, he might be able to say those things, for there was something about him that you could not say frankly. There were no words to express it. Everybody loved him; nobody loved him with a condescending love; everybody had some trace of reverence in their love for him. It is that trace which came and went, which we find so elusive, so hard to put into words. But we all recognize it. One woman was asked one time if she believed in God. She said, "Well, to tell the truth, I've never got so far as God. I believe in Mr. Davis. In a way he takes God's place for me."

A great many nice things have been said about greatness in human wisdom by poets and philosophers, by those who quote the Bible. We are continually being reminded of those things. We are reminded of certain sentences of Emerson's famous Divinity School address: "Thou new-fledged bard of the Holy Ghost, be to them a divine man. Acquaint men at first hand with Deity." Earl Davis was a divine man. There was something in him that we do not find in all men. We read the New Testament, we come across the words of Jesus. He that is the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and we think to ourselves how well those words fit him. When Jesus called himself the son of man, he leaves in our hearts the deep-rooted suspicion that he meant more than just himself, somebody else. He uses the words generically: he meant anybody who was like him, anybody who belonged in his class, any greathearted, sympathetic, helpful lover of his kind, who always suffered more than the sufferer, and always rejoiced more in other people's happiness and good fortune than in his own. We know that to the Jew, a bad man was the son of Belial, because Belial was their name for the devil. To Jesus the good man was the Son of Man, because man, as he ought to be, was the creature of

God in Heaven. If anyone had the right to share that honorable title with Jesus of Nazareth, it was Earl Davis.

No minister had a clearer, a more valid, or a more mandatory call to the ministry than he did. We sometimes speak of a born teacher, a born musician, a born leader of men. He was a born minister, and to save his life he could not be anything else. He showed it in everything he said and did, in everything he was. He showed it most of all in two rather definite ways.

In the first place, he had that strong natural liking for people, for his fellow men, for humanity that we sometimes see. His first instinctive approach to any human contact was the readiness to be a friend, the readiness to see all the good qualities possible in any man or woman whom he met, and to assume that those good qualities were the real man and the real woman; and that the good first impression that he invariably took from everyone whom he met must be the true impression, and that it would be justified by all further and closer acquaintance. It was the easiest thing in the world to win his friendship. He offered it to you right straight away at the beginning, and with a certain eagerness, as though he were urging you to accept it. You had to work really hard to win his dislike. He hated to dislike anybody. The surest way to hurt his feelings was to say something critical or unkind about another person. He himself felt worse about that than even the other person might have felt. And he always came back with some plausible reason to explain it all away, or with some extenuating circumstance, or with some counterbalancing virtue. We have heard it said -- perhaps we have thought it ourselves -- that the world which we inhabit is, of course, partly, the world of uncompromising, undefatigable, objective experiences; the things that happen that we can't help but we've got to take on the chin whether we like it or not. It is partly that. But the world which we inhabit in our minds and ideals and day dreams is chiefly the world which we see through our own eyes,

the world as we ourselves make it in our understanding of it. What Emerson said of Abraham Lincoln is another of those sayings we think of in connection with Mr. Davis: His heart was as wide as the world, but there was no room in it for a single unkind thought. And the consequence was that he habitually lived in a world that was peopled by noble women, and by men for whom he had his favorite expression, royal good fellows.

In the second place, he vindicated his call to the ministry in the response that his own people made to his very evident liking for them. It was so real and so sincere that the dullest nature and the thickest skin could not keep it out. Everybody was aware of it. He likes us! We all like to be liked. That is a common trait in our weak human nature, or in our noble human nature, whichever way we want to put it. We naturally turn to those who like us, and like them in return. We instinctively try to live up to their expectations concerning us, so as to win their approval and deserve their affection. And the consequence is that to be liked by a bad man is just about the most dangerous experience that there is, because at once we are placed under a sort of pressure to live down to that bad man's bad expectations, to deserve his liking, and win his approval. But on the other hand, to be liked by a good man is the most ennobling experience that there is, because at once we are put under that quiet pressure that never leaves us to live up to that good man's good expectations, to win his approval, and to deserve his affection. And that, as we understand it, is exactly what James Russell Lowell meant when he said at the death of Emerson, "What an antiseptic a good man is!" There again we have a saying that applies almost exactly to Mr. Davis. He was an antiseptic for this entire community. The trout in the well does not have to do anything special, because just by being a trout in the well, he keeps the water clean and sweet. Just by being himself, in Petersham, Mr. Davis made the whole town a better, a sweeter, a happier place.

He had a very active and a very powerful mind. He was constantly reading worth-while books. He was what they call a provocative thinker, that is to say, a thinker, the kind of thinker that always makes other people think. He never preached a sermon that did not contain at least one glistening gem of original and fearless thought. There are scores of his fellow ministers who stand ready to testify that the best sermons they ever preached were those that had come to them from something Mr. Davis had said to them. And yet the best sermon that he ever preached was the sermon that he never really preached at all: it was the mute, the unspoken sermon of his whole faithful life, his whole steady personality.....

He was a completely self-dedicated man. Once for all he had given himself to his calling, and barring his family responsibilities, that calling had prior claim to his attention. And even the family responsibilities had to make some concessions to that calling. He cared nothing for earthly rewards: for wealth, or fame, or preferment. There was one time in his life when money was so short that he had to take a week-day job in one of our great manufacturing concerns. For over a year he tried to be two things; a minor executive on week days in a vast factory, and evenings and Sundays minister of his beloved little church. It proved too much, even for his iron constitution. One or the other of those (ties) had to be (broken). The church could promise no increase at all in his tiny stipend; but the factory offered him a salary that seemed at the time munificent. And it was. Today it would have run into five figures. He was not sorely tempted. He chuckled three or four times — I can hear him. Then he dropped the factory and stayed with his church.

He had been born and brought up in the Valley of Humiliation. To live there all his life was no hardship whatever, a simple, humble country parson, loving his fellow man, beloved of them, because they recognized the

lifting influence of his friendship. They knew that he expected the best they could give; and therefore, in his presence, they were always at their best.

He hated sham, pretence, and hypocrisy with all his might. He did not know how to pose. He never sailed under false colors. He never spoke a false word, if he knew what he was saying. He had nothing to be ashamed of, and nothing to hide. He was as clear as crystal. His mercy was as plain as the day. His honor was as hard as stone.

He held fast his simple sense
 And spoke the speech of innocence;
 And with hand and body and blood
 He made his bosom counsel good.
 He that feeds men, serveth few;
 He serves all, who dares be true.

And come to think of it, there is the entire gist of his ministry in this town. For twenty years Petersham has enjoyed the ennobling experience of being loved by one who was true to his God, and true to his fellowmen, and true to himself.

Let us unite in prayer.

Lord, when the sky is dark and the ground trembles under our feet, we cling to the thought of thee for support. We turn to thee now with our universal human cry for comfort and steadiness. Thou has taken from our sight one who has been dearer to us than self, one to whom we have looked for the clean examples, and the great thoughts, and the pure motives that are ever our choicest graces. We acknowledge thy merciful wisdom; and even though our hearts are wrung with grief, our first impulse is to raise unto thee a prayer of thanksgiving that he who loved us, and whom we love, is delivered from pain, his work finished, his trials at an end. Accept our hearts' gratitude that thou hast given thy beloved sleep. As we look forward into the future, a future that is strange and empty and dark, let thine understanding and thy pity be mindful of us. Our love, like a lost child, searches vainly for its

object, and hears no answer to its call. Tell us that the answer is still there; that though hearts are dust, heart's love remains; that he is still with us nearer than sight, closer than the sound of words, a warm and deathless presence, more real because more free. Bless unto us our wealth of memories: his strength and tenderness, his righteousness and charity, his truth and purity, his honor and self-respect. Let these memories live ever in our hearts, to fill our emptiness with companionship, and to make vocal our silence with the old words of cheer and trust and courage. Grant that our remaining days may be guided and brightened by these unseen influences; that our pathway may be made straight and open. Strengthen us to do our appointed work faithfully and well; to walk among men with justice and fair dealing; to face each disappointment or danger with courage; and to see the pride in his beloved eyes. When thy last summons comes to us, grant us to meet it with neither fear nor amazement, and to walk forth, upright and confident, into the kindly mystery that awaits us all. We pray unto thee, O God, in the spirit of our Christ.

And now may that spirit that was in Jesus be in us also, enabling us to know the truth, to do the will of God, and to abide in his peace, evermore. Amen.