

In Memoriam
George Magnuson 1934-2018

Isaiah 25:6-9
Psalm 126
1 John 3:1-2
Matthew 5:1-16

The first time I sat down at George and Carrie's table
Was ten years ago,
Soon after I met them.

As was so often the case,
It was to be a musical evening,
In celebration of George's birthday,
With guests bringing something special
To play on George's epic,
Incredible,
Indescribable stereo system.

Carrie described the evening,
And offered a theme for our musical offerings.
And she ended by saying,
"George will have no responsibilities
that evening –
other than, of course,
being George."

Being George.
I didn't know him very well then,
And so I wondered,
What does it mean,
To be George?

Then the evening came,
And George welcomed us,
Lavished hospitality upon us,
Laughed with us,
Exclaimed with us,
Probed deep questions with us,
And offered us a glimpse of the pure goodness of life.

And I thought,
This is what it means to be George.

Then it came time for the music.

George appreciated,
Exclaimed,

And then, at one moment
Of pure, ecstatic beauty,
He flung himself backward,
Lost in bliss,
Enraptured.

And I thought,
Oh, this is what it means to be George.

Being George.
Being George was a particular state of blessedness.
Not that it was all easy –
Far from it.
He knew sorrow early,
Suffered more than many
And knew deep and terrible losses
Even in the last months of his life.
And he died too soon.
Suddenly, unexpectedly,
In the midst of life.
And yet, neither he nor we
Could fail to call him blessed.

Because blessedness has nothing to do with freedom from pain.
It has everything to do with embrace
Of the beautiful and the good,
The holy, the beyond, the more.
The infinite that he was glad to call God.
The promise that he boldly called
The resurrection.

So what does it mean
To be George,
In the great mystery of the resurrection?

I have no idea,
And at the same time,
With George,
It is easy to imagine.

Because he had, so often,
One foot already on the other shore.
One hand reaching out to part the veil.

One eye, already,
So often on the prize.
George, in his embrace of the holy,
Had already a glimpse
Of the abundant life that waits beyond our life and death.

Not that he didn't adore life.
Not that he wasn't endlessly curious.
Not that he was anywhere near perfect –
Nor should he have been.
George had plenty of foibles,
And even some faults.

But beyond all that,
And running through it,
Was his immense capacity for love.

For love, for discovery,
For embrace of the mystery,
For bedazzlement,
For awe.
For self discovery and for revelation.

And so he was ready,
As ready as one can be,
Who is still in love with life,
To enter a new realm of revelation,
Of unveiling, of truth finding.
Ready to find out what it means,
In the end, to be a child of God.

We are God's children now,
Says one of the great wisdom writers
Of the early church,
We are God's children now.
What we will be has yet to be revealed.

Who is George now?
What does it mean now,
Being George?

The last time I sat down at George and Carrie's table
Was just a few weeks before he died.
It was another evening of pure enjoyment,
Of rich foods, of flowing wine,
Of music and laughter.

It turns out, though none of us knew it then,
that it was a foretaste of the kingdom.
Whenever friends gather to remember, to share,
To give thanks and to celebrate,
It is some semblance of the feast of God.

And now for George
the promise has come true,
the glimpse abides,
the feast has begun on the holy mountain.
Is that a metaphor? A beautiful image?
A true description?

What I know is this.
George put his trust in the truth of our life in God.
And he wanted to convey that,
The richness of life in God,
Adding savor as salt does,
Bringing light that cannot be dimmed.
He wanted to share that,
To offer a glimpse of how good,
How dense with meaning,
How fragrant with beauty it all could be.

He did his best to share that,
In his rich web of relationships,
His passion for music,
His preaching and teaching
And sheer unfiltered rapture
And willingness to be present to pain.
It was enough,
And more than enough.
His greatest gift to us
Was showing us what a gift life was,
What a gift love was,
What a gift we were.

But now,
Gathered into the mystery of the more,
He has no more responsibilities.

Other than, of course, being George.
The new George,
The fullness of George
That was waiting to be revealed.

Because he loved so much,
We know something of who he is now,
Gathered into love.

Because he wondered so much,
We know something of who he is now,
Gathered into wonder.

Because he trusted so much,
We can entrust him to the truth.

Being George, in the end,
Was all about becoming.
Becoming the George he is
Revealed in God's eternal now.