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## *Words for Dick Denny*

**A homily for the funeral of Dick Denny  
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler**

We all bring special memories of Dick Denny to this holy place today. I am honored to speak a few words in remembrance. But it sure is a challenge to speak of such a towering figure: a lawyer and a leader, a husband and father, grandfather and great-grandfather. He towered over so many of us, as both a gentleman and a competitor, a man who loved conversation and who loved learning.

He was also my uncle, and he was my godfather. That means he was the father to many of the people I grew up with. Indeed, he and I are both part of an enormous family, many of whom are here today.

So, if you will permit me, I want to speak to family today. Of course, I mean all of you. Some of us here today are blood related. But others of us are here today because we worked with him, or we played with him, or we contested with him. Those contests may have been in law firms or real estate deals, or on golf courses, or in wine tastings. Dick's towering competitive drive helped elect Jimmy Carter as President of the United States. His contests were surely a part of Ahmic Lake, in Ontario, Canada; and those contests may have been—of course—in our own family relationships. We are all family here today. We know his contests.

Yes, he contested. But, he also loved. He loved in his contests. His was not always the way many of us love, but it was sure his way. Today, we gather to cheer his loves. Sometimes they were impatient and determined, but they were loves. Thank you, Dick, and:

Cheers!

Cheers to Dick! And to his homes and families. He was at home—in his family—in so many places. For instance, when he regularly emceed the High Museum Wine Auction! Has there ever been a more handsome and happy figure on the stage? Yes, actually there was! It was earlier, when his towering figure won the Kelly Cup Sailing Race on Ahmic! And, there he was again, at such a later age, winning the Kelly Cup Sailing Race again!

And he was at home, in his family, with his wit. It was mischievous, for sure, but it was witty. Most of you remember the tricks he played. Sometimes, we never knew—at the time—whether he was serious or not.

It is said that Dick used row a rowboat from one end of Ahmic Lake to the other—sort of—from Dixie Cabin to Rocky Reef, to pay his respects. Dick was strong. Dick was determined. Dick wanted his way.

Most of us could not keep up with his way. But we tolerated it. And I, for one, rather admired it. He took on things intellectually and determinedly.

But, we knew, that—determined as he was—he was sometimes wrong. He did not know it at the time, but he knows it now. He, We, all of us, we take on things with sheer determination, not knowing that we may be wrong. Dick did, too; and he has taught us those things.

I didn't know Dick when he left Washington and Lee in mid-course and came back to Atlanta. For whatever reason it occurred, his exile back in Atlanta was providential. While spending penal time in Atlanta, he met Marg, Margaret Hunt, who was surely the best thing that ever happened to Dick Denny. He would not be anywhere, and none of us would even be here, if not for her. Reaching out to rescue Dick Denny. Dick knew he needed warmth in his life, and Marg provided it. Thank you, Marg.

Many of you knew his love for Ahmic Lake, the lake of many loves. He took an early law firm sabbatical in order to assemble a book of that name, "The Lake of Many Loves." Some of the stories may not be accurate, but most of them are; and they are beautiful. Because Dick paid attention to the things he loved. Dick paid attention to the people he loved.

Yes, his love, and his attention, were baffling sometimes. But we would not be here had we not realized it. If Dick Denny paid attention to you, in whatever way, he was loving you, in whatever way.

I wish he had had time to write more books. He could have written about other parts of his family, and other parts of his law firm, and other parts of Atlanta.

And, if he had had time, he might have written about other parts of his own self, his own life, his own wounds and desires. His was the journey we are all on.

My mother, as most of you know, is Dick's sister. She tells the story of asking her father, who was also Dick's father, what he wanted for Christmas one year. How do you give your father a Christmas present? What do you want, Daddy?

Her father, Dick's father, in his own complicated way, answered, "All I want is the peace that passes all understanding." The peace that passes all understanding. Those words are on the gravestone of Richard Denny, Senior, in Rome, Georgia. Dick's father.

May those words rest with Dick, too. I am not sure Dick knew he wanted peace. As we all know, Dick wanted perfection. He was a perfectionist. And it frustrated him when things did not go perfectly.

Sailing, sports, legal deals, golf, children, wines, cooking. He wanted them all to be perfect. And we all know that perfectionism is a hard thing to put on other people. So, we give it back to him today. We give perfectionism back to Dick. Perfect love is the peace of God. We give over to Dick the peace of God. Margaret, Richard, Dallas, Lee: we give over to Dick the peace of God today. Let it go.

Someone once said, "Love is not a victory march. It's a cold and it's a broken hallelujah." Today, we will say, "All of us go down to the dust; yet even at the grave we make our song, 'Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.'"

All of us, no matter how towering we are, go down to the dust. Dick Denny has towered over us. But now, now, he looks up to us, like the fertile earth of a garden he tended. People in heaven are looking up to us! Dick looks up to us in peace. When we let him go in peace, we are letting go in love.

Yes, in his own way, peace is what Dick wanted: Peace, perfect peace. The peace that we all want. The peace that passes all understanding, even in the tossing and tumbling and determinations and contests of life.

Dick, now in the merciful arms of Jesus, has found that peace. He is with his father; he is with his mother, --with Willy and Fred!--in a different kind of perfection: the perfection of peace. It is the perfection of peace, the peace of God. It is the perfection of love, the love of God.

God's perfect love accepts all of us, and God's perfect love receives Dick into eternal mercy today.

AMEN.