

November 22, 2020 – 10:00 am

ST. JOHN
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



TOTENFEST
**Celebrating those who
have gone before us**



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ANNOUNCEMENTS: IN-PERSON WORSHIP IS SUSPENDED DUE TO COVID. YOU WILL BE NOTIFIED WHEN IT WILL RESUME. IF YOU ARE RECEIVING THIS BULLETIN FOR THE FIRST TIME AND WOULD LIKE TO CONTINUE TO RECEIVE IT, EMAIL ME OR CALL ME.

UNISON CALL TO WORSHIP:

Know that the Holy One is God.

We are God's people.

Worship the Holy One with gladness;

Come into God's presence with singing.

Enter God's gates with thanksgiving,
and God's courts with praise.

Make a joyful noise!

For God is good; God's steadfast love endures forever,
and God's faithfulness to all generations.

Let us worship with thanks and joy!

Let us praise God in song and word and prayer!

UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

Gracious God, we long to know you better.

**Open us to recognize your presence, to receive you fully,
and to be ready to follow your leading. Amen.**

GOSPEL LESSON: **Matthew 25:31 – 46**

³¹ "Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left.

³⁴ “Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. ³⁵ I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.’

³⁷ “Then those who are righteous will reply to him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸ When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

⁴⁰ “Then the king will reply to them, ‘I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Get away from me, you who will receive terrible things. Go into the unending fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² I was hungry and you didn’t give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you didn’t give me anything to drink. ⁴³ I was a stranger and you didn’t welcome me. I was naked and you didn’t give me clothes to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’

⁴⁴ “Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and didn’t do anything to help you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer, ‘I assure you that when you haven’t done it for one of the least of these, you haven’t done it for me.’ ⁴⁶ And they will

go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous ones will go into eternal life.”

This is the Word of God. It is true and can be trusted.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

SERMON: **“One of the Least of These”**

**Thoughts by Rev. Fred Craddock.*

When you’re on the last chapter of the book you are reading, you expect all the loose ends to come together and all the characters will have last words expressing love, they all kiss, and live happily-ever-after. That’s sort of how our scripture text goes today . . . except for the happily-ever-after part.

*With this teaching, Jesus concludes his public instruction. Matthew, the author of this Gospel, wants this to be the lingering lesson. This text is not a parable but an apocalyptic vision. In Greek, the term *apokapypsis* simply means “revelation.” This type of biblical literature emphasizes the lifting of the veil between heaven and earth and the revelation of God and God’s plan for the world. (The Bible dictionary describes apocalyptic writings as being marked by distinctive literary features, particularly prediction of future events and accounts of visionary experiences or journeys to heaven, often involving vivid symbolism.)

What I hear Jesus saying in this text is, “I’ve been teaching for 3 years and now comes the final exam. It all comes down to this.”

*The purpose of this apocalyptic vision is not speculation about the end or for the fascination of the community. Rather the vision is the vehicle for ethical instruction. The

heart of it is the coming (“Parousia” 24:3) of the Son of Man. His coming is not to the earth, but to the throne in heavenly glory. The scene is an enthronement, the Son of Man being installed as King and Judge.

*The “coming” (parousia) has been dealt with already: it will be sudden as the lightning (24:27); it will be on clouds of glory with great power (24:30-31); the day and hour are unknown (24:36-42); it will be as a burglar entering at night (24:43); it will be a time of reckoning and woe to the unprepared (24:45-51). Three parables have dealt with the delay of the coming (24:45-25:30). But now comes the full vision, glorious in appearance, cosmic in scope, and yet personal in that every life must appear before the judgment seat.

*Three elements in the vision draw special attention. First, the basis for the final judgment is one’s response to human need (vv.35-36). These needs are not unusual but present themselves in the ordinary coming and going of one’s life. Second, both those at the right and at the left are surprised that they have so served or failed to serve Christ (vv.37-39, 44.) This touch of being surprised is a beautiful portrait of those saints whose service to others is so much a part of their behavior that they are embarrassed at the recital of their deeds and amazed that serve to those in need is serve to Christ. **(Thus, today we are honoring those who have come before us.)** And the element of surprise also describes vividly those who were busily religious in attention-getting ways but who bypassed the scenes of human anguish.

*And finally, the vision reminds the reader (**us**) that service to another is service to Christ. Amen.

SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE: TOTENFEST

Sunday, November 22, is the last Sunday of the Church Year and, in the old German tradition, is the day for remembering those who have passed from this life into life eternal or whose funeral service was held during the last Church Year. (The Church Year begins on the First Sunday of Advent and ends the Sunday before Advent.)

Totenfest, literally, the Festival of the Dead, is the time set aside in our worship service to name our sisters and brothers who no longer answer the call in this life, to commemorate their passing with a rose and a ringing of the chime, and to offer special prayers of thanksgiving for their journey with us on this earth.

"In every age, we have the gift and the pleasure to discover God anew, to race after the flowing tide of grace and let it wash over each and every one of us. The saints show us how it's done. We are glad to be honoring them today." –

Rev. Chelsey Hillyer

Those whom we celebrate today are people who loved their God. Perhaps they didn’t verbalize their beliefs or were the epitome of perfect behavior, yet they were and still are loved by many.

As creations and gifts from God, we honor them today. They may have suffered much, in their earthly life. We, who remain here on earth, believe that in their death, they experience no hunger, nor thirst and no longer will they be oppressed. They will inherit the Kingdom of God. We give thanks to God for their lives.



On this Day of Totenfest, we remember and celebrate saints of yesterday and of today; faithful people who set their hopes on Christ and who with their lives, praised God. May our hearts and minds be open to new realities in Christ. We want to be counted among saints who will inherit your kingdom.

May we, in this time together, commit ourselves to living lives that are pleasing to God.

LET US PRAY IN UNISON: O Precious God of all times and of all faithful people We seek Your presence and Your blessing on us. We recognize ourselves as Yours. We are the faithful. We gather in this sacred place to witness to Your power as we remember those who have gone before us to Your loving arms. Amen.

Those we are honoring today are:

Robert “Bob” Feldman	July 3, 1948 – November 27, 2019
Roger P. Fox	May 16, 1929 – March 8, 2020
Barbara Ann Moran	September 4, 1937 – July 29, 2020
Thomas G. Petroff	April 1, 1929 – September 10, 2020
Betty Jean Hayes	July 2, 1929 – November 8, 2020



PASTORAL PRAYER:

Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer.

Our gracious and ever-caring God, we come to you today to celebrate those who have gone before us. But we also celebrate your presence with the living. You remain with us through sad times and happy, and we are very grateful.

Knowing your love for us all, we lift up to you our world and our country. We pray for those who lead and govern in every nation, that they may lead with charity and justice in their hearts. We pray for our country during this time of transition to different administration, that all goes smoothly for the good of all citizens.

We pray for those affected by this pandemic, those who are sick, those who have died, those who have lost their jobs. We also remember all the front-line health care workers who have worked to the point of exhaustion as this disease has affected so many people. Help all of us to care for our neighbors as we wear our masks, keep distance from others, and wash our hands frequently. We may not be doctors, but we can prevent spreading the disease to others by thinking of all in our communities.

We pray for all those on our prayer list; those who mourn, those who are lonely during this time of isolation, those who are in pain, those who are weary of being ill. May they feel your loving arms around them and give them peace. We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, as we pray together . . .

THE LORD’S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed it be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

THANK YOU FOR SHARING: The riches we enjoy grant to us an exciting opportunity to be generous and work for good. Through our offerings, we seek to share the good news, to bind up the injured, strengthen the weak, secure justice for the oppressed, and bring back those who have strayed. Thank you all for sharing in this ministry.

UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

God of steadfast love, receive these expressions of our thanks for the glorious inheritance entrusted to us. We hereby enlist ourselves and our resources toward the realization of your eternal purpose for all humanity. May this congregation become more and more a source of hope for each of us and for all we meet. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Go forth in faith, with love for all the saints. Open your eyes to see the good in all you meet. Among God's gifts is a spirit of wisdom and revelation. God grants insight and resources to be helpful to others. We partake of eternal life through our caring. We sense life's meaning in the midst of our sharing. God's steadfast love inspires our risk-taking service. God's faithfulness to us evokes our generosity. Amen.

PRAYER LIST: Rich Scmitt, Nelson Libell, Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Perce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Shari Hamiton, Becky Ballard, Amy Annis, Kim Martin.

(If you know of any of these people who could be removed from the list, please let the Secretary know.)

