

November 21, 2021 – 10:00 am

TOTENFEST

**Celebrating those
who have gone before us**



St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights,
IL
397-6323
Rev. Rosemary Captain

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

See how God loves us!

God loves us enough to swallow up death
forever. See how Christ loves us!

Christ loves us enough to share our loss and
grief. See how the Spirit loves us!

The Holy Spirit loves us enough to offer us
words of hope we can trust.

***PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

As we gather here, we ask your
blessing on this celebration of life for our
loved ones who have passed. Almighty
God, thank you for sending us your Son,
who changed death into life by sacrificing
himself for us. Spirit of God, resting upon
us, may your power enflame us with your
peace. May your peace touch us with your

grace. May your grace fill us with your hope. May your hope lead us into your Kingdom. Let it begin now, as we listen, learn, and praise you. Amen.

*GOSPEL LESSON: John 14:1-3, 18-19, 25-27

14 “Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. ² My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? ³ When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too.

¹⁸ “I won’t leave you as orphans. I will come to you. ¹⁹ Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too.

²⁵ “I have spoken these things to you while I am with you. ²⁶ The

Companion,^[a] the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you.

²⁷ “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be troubled or afraid. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

SERMON: “God is Our Comfort”

When we think about our specific loved ones who has passed to be with God, it’s hard. We miss them. No matter if they passed this year, last year, or 50 years ago. We still grieve. And then we talk about celebrating their life. Again, it’s hard. How can we do both things?

One thing we can do is look to God's help and promises; such as in the Psalms. Psalm 27:13 "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" Psalm 141:8 "But my eyes are turned towards you, O God, my Lord; in you I seek refuge." We can also find comfort in the words of Jesus in the passage I just read.

There comes a time when we have to believe where we cannot prove and to accept where we cannot understand. If, in the darkest hour, we believe that somehow there is a purpose in life and that that purpose is love, even the unbearable becomes bearable and even in the darkness there is a glimmer of light.

Jesus adds something to that. He says not only: "Believe in God." He also says:

"Believe in me." If the psalmist could believe in the ultimate goodness of God, how much more can we? For Jesus is the proof that God is willing to give us everything he has to give. As the Apostle Paul put it in Romans 8:32: "He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?"

If we believe that in Jesus we see the picture of God, then, in the face of that amazing love, it becomes not easy but at least possible to accept even what we cannot understand, and in the storms of life to retain a faith that is serene.

After services I have held at Funeral Homes, many times people will come up to me and say, "but he was not a godly man?"

by which they mean the person who has passed did not belong to a church, or even want anything to do with religion.

God cares for them anyway. God created us all and loves us all. God will take care of all who have passed, even if **we** believe that person was not “godly.” If God loves you, God loves everyone. God does not discriminate.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, ²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I’m gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. ³⁰ My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light.” Jesus can take some of your grief into his heart, leaving you with the chance to celebrate the life of your loved one.

Amen

SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE: TOTENFEST
Sunday, November 21, 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.

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. "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

Roger P. Fox May 16, 1929 - March 8, 2020

Barbara Moran Sept 4, 1937 – July 29, 2020

Tom Petroff April 1, 1929 – Sept. 10, 2020

Betty Hayes July 2, 1929 – Nov. 8, 2020

James M. Underwood

Sept 20, 1945 – Dec. 13, 2020

Andrew Whitaker-Portz

Oct 16, '90 - March 13, '21

Jack Gammon June 17, 1948 – April 26, '21

Ruth Ogles March 30, 1929 – May 25, '21

PASTORAL PRAYER:

God of deepest love, You have blessed us
with saints all of our lives,

God of the ages: those who put up with us,
and those who prepared us for discipleship;

those who have touched us with their
compassion, and those who illumine the
way for us.

Through the valleys and over the hills,
down the dusty streets of every village,
saints traveled with you, Jesus, Child of
grace and glory: those who impetuously
chased after you, and those whose feet
longed to turn back; those who jostled for
your attention, and those who made sure
little children were able to meet you.

You surround us with saints, even when
we don't recognize or much less appreciate
them, Spirit of wonder: some live down the
corner from us, while others are on the
other side of the world;

some run to catch the leaves spiraling to the ground, while others make a meal for a sick neighbor's family.

We pray for those who are ill, in pain, lonely, or grieving that they may feel your comfort all around them.

For all the saints of every age, especially our age, we give you our gratitude and praise.

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed 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.

OFFERING OF GIFTS, TITHES AND SELVES:
Thank you for continuing your support of St. John UCC. Missions may continue if you participate.

*PRAYER OF DEDICATION: Now, as God's saints in this time and place, we have the opportunity to feed others from the abundance of all we have, to swallow up the pain and suffering of others, to wipe away the tears of children who are lonely and fearful. May the gifts we offer, and the lives we lead, reveal the One for whom we have waited and who invites us to spread grace over all the world. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

***BENEDICTION:**

Because God loves all of us, past, present, and future, let us go show others just how much God loves them!

We will go to bring life into all the places where death seeks to swallow those around us.

Now let us go to show our sisters and brothers how much Christ loves them!

We will go to share in the loss and grief of everyone around us.

Now let us go to show the world how much the Spirit loves them!

We will offer words of hope to all filled with despair. Amen.