SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2026
TOTENFEST
REVELATION 7:9-17

St. John United Church of Christ
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(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI License #11164431
**Please stand if comfortably able.*
Respond with words in bold print.
Bible translation – CEB Common English Bible

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:
THE BELL IS RUNG:
PRELUDE: "Let All Things Now Living" Mark Hayes
PENNIES FOR MISSION: Open and Affirming Coalition

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**
(inspired by Psalm 34)
One: Bless the Holy One with continuous praise. Magnify Love and let us exalt God's many names together!
Many: We sought the Gracious One. God answered and delivered.
One: Bless the Sovereign One with boasting and gladness.
Many: We turn to the Glorious God who radiates joy and safety upon us.
One: Bless the Mighty God who encamps around us!
Many: O taste and experience that God is good! Praise the Holy One!

INVOCATION:
Creator of the Multitude, be present among us as we gather. Let us worship you in praise and thanksgiving, in spirit and in truth, in season and out of season. May our souls reach toward you and our hearts burn as we encounter you afresh. Renew our minds through your word and our spirits through our praise. May your name be magnified and glorified in our assembly, and may your path become clearer for all who follow you. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 381 "Faith of the Martyrs"**

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**
Loving God, we confess that we have not embraced your vision of beloved community. We find ways to restrict who belongs and fail to make space for

diversity and difference. We bicker over how we worship and consider practices other than our own with indifference and disdain rather than appreciation and curiosity. We allow the divisiveness of the world to separate your church. We center ourselves in worship and try to make you in our image rather than expanding the circle and recognizing your image in our neighbor. Transform us, O God, so that we may reflect the beauty of your creation and the vastness of your love. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**
Beloved, transformation is possible with the help of God. Receive the grace, courage, and strength the Holy One offers to remove barriers and erect bridges. God is with us on this journey. Listen to Spirit who guides and binds us in love and truth.

***GLORIA:**
Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat twice)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

OLD TESTAMENT: Revelation 7:9-17
9 After this I looked, and there was a great crowd that no one could number. They were from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They were standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They wore white robes and held palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out with a loud voice:
"Victory belongs to our God
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb."

11 All the angels stood in a circle around the throne, and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell facedown before the throne and worshipped God,
12 saying,

"Amen! Blessing and glory
and wisdom and thanksgiving
and honor and power and might
be to our God forever and always. Amen."

13 Then one of the elders said to me, "Who are these people wearing white robes, and where did they come from?" 14 I said to him, "Sir, you know."Then he said to me, "These people have come out of great hardship. They have washed their robes and made them white in

the Lamb's blood. [15] This is the reason they are before God's throne. They worship him day and night in his temple, and the one seated on the throne will shelter them. [16] They won't hunger or thirst anymore. No sun or scorching heat will beat down on them, [17] because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them. He will lead them to the springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 34:1-10, 22 Page 644

EPISTLE LESSON: 1 John 3:1-3

3 See what kind of love the Father has given to us in that we should be called God's children, and that is what we are! Because the world didn't recognize him, it doesn't recognize us.
[2] Dear friends, now we are God's children, and it hasn't yet appeared what we will be. We know that when he appears we will be like him because we'll see him as he is. [3] And all who have this hope in him purify themselves even as he is pure.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 5:1-12**

5 [1] Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him.
[2] He taught them, saying:

Happy people
[3] "Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
[4] "Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.
[5] "Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.
[6] "Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.
[7] "Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.
[8] "Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.
[9] "Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God's children.
[10] "Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
[11] "Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. [12] Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.

MESSAGE: "What Are the Beatitudes?"

I have always loved the Beatitudes; simple words that can calm us down and left up our spirit. I never really studied the background of these "sayings" so let's do that. It might change your mind of how you feel about these sayings; perhaps for the better or for the worse. I'm going to share with you the thoughts of Rev. N.T, Wright.

"Jesus wasn't simply a great teacher, and if we try to describe him like that we will misunderstand him. This passage is the beginning of the famous 'Sermon on the Mount' which runs through chapters 5, 6, and 7 of Matthew's Gospel, and sets out, in Matthew's presentation of it, the main themes of Jesus' proclamation. People often say what wonderful teaching the Sermon on the Mount is, and that if only people would obey it the world would be a better place. But if we think of Jesus simply sitting there telling people how to behave properly, we will miss what was really going on. These "blessings,' the 'wonderful news,' that he is announcing, are not saying 'try hard to live like this.' They are saying that people who already *are* like that are in good shape. They should be happy and celebrate.

Jesus is not suggesting that these are simply timeless truths about the way the world is about human behavior. If he was saying that, he was wrong. Mourners often go uncomforted, the meek don't inherit the earth, those who long for justice frequently take that longing to the grave. This is an upside-down world or perhaps a right-way up world, *and Jesus is saying that with his work it's starting to come true.* This is an announcement, not a philosophical analysis of the world. It's about something that's starting to happen, not about a general truth of life. It is *gospel;* good news, not good advice.

Follow me, Jesus said to the first disciples, because in him the living God was doing a new thing, and this list of 'wonderful news' is part of his invitation, part of his summons, part of his way of saying that God is at work in a fresh way and that this is what it looks like. Jesus is beginning a new era for God's people and God's world. From here on, all the controls people thought they knew about are going to work the other way around. In our world, still, most people think wonderful news consists of success, wealth, long life, victory in battle. Jesus is offering wonderful news for the humble, the poor, the mourners, the peacemakers.

The word for 'wonderful news' is often translated 'blessed', and part of the point is that this is *God's* wonderful news. God is acting in and through Jesus to turn the world upside down, to turn Israel upside down, to pour out lavish 'blessings' on all who now turn to him and accept the new thing that he is doing. (This list is

sometimes call 'the Beatitudes' because the Latin word 'beatus' means "blessed'.) But the point is not to offer a list of what sort of people God normally blesses. The point is to announce God's new covenant.

Since the time that Deuteronomy was written, God has given many promises to Israel. God listed the blessings and the curses that would come upon the people who were obedient or disobedient. When Jesus came God made a new covenant with the people.

So when do all these promises come true? There is a great temptation for Christians to answer; in heaven, after death. At first sight of our passage, and especially in verses 3, 10, and 11 the passage seems to say this; the 'kingdom of heaven' belongs to the poor in spirit and the persecuted, and there's a great reward 'in heaven' for those who suffer persecution, and there's a great reward 'in heaven' for those who suffer persecution for Jesus' sake. This, though, is a misunderstanding of the meaning of 'heaven'. Heaven is God's space, where full reality exists, close by our ordinary ('earthly') reality and interlocking with it. One day heaven and earth will be joined together for ever, and the true state of affairs, at present out of sight, will be unveiled. After all, verse 5 says that the meek will inherit the earth, and that can hardly happen in a disembodies heaven after death.

No, the clue comes in the next chapter of Matthew, in the prayer Jesus taught his followers. We are to pray that God's kingdom will come, and God's will be done, 'on earth as it is in heaven.' The life of heaven- the life of the realm where God is already king – is to become the life of the world, transforming the present 'earth' into the place of beauty and delight that God always intended. *And those who follow Jesus are to begin tolive by this rule here and now.* That's the point of the Sermon on the Mount, and these 'beatitudes' in particular. They are a summons to live in the present in the way that will make sense in God's promised future; because that future has arrived in the present in Jesus of Nazareth. It may seem upside down, but we are called to believe, with great daring, that it is in fact the right way up. Try it and see." Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: "Abide with Me" Video

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Abba, Father, Mother, Creator, your Son Jesus taught us to pray with such familiarity and also most profoundly to pray for the coming of the kingdom on earth.

Teach the rich the blessedness of generosity; give the poor the understanding that one day the proud will be brought low, and the lowly lifted up; and teach us all to share unselfishly that there may be enough of your good gifts of the earth for all.

Grant to our leaders in government a concern for people that they may seek to provide for others the benefits they take for themselves. Teach us all to do to others as we would have them do to us.

Discipline our reactions to hostility so that our response to violence may be restrained and that both our private life and our street life may be more orderly and peaceful.

Bless every program that seeks to provide for the hungry both in emergency situations and when there are shortages.

Be with your church everywhere but especially we remember Christian minorities that are persecuted for their faith by people and governments around the world. Grant them consolations in their suffering and grace sufficient for their needs.

We pray for those struggling with health and mental challenges. We pray for all those on our prayer list. May they feel your loving arms of comfort in these times of discomfort.

We pray all these things in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

OUR LORD'S PRAYER:

PRAYER RESPONSE: 773

Remember me, remember me, O Jesus, remember me.

CELEBRATING THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US

The old German tradition known as Totenfest, literally meaning "Festival of the Dead", is a time for remembering by name and in prayer each of our sisters and brothers who have entered into God's eternal home in this past Church Year.

When a loved one passes, we who remain have questions; lots of questions. We may never find answers to all this questions until we ourselves see God face-to-face. So, in the meantime we can learn from our Bible passages. We can find the promises of God, and they can give us comfort.

Psalm 145:18-19 **God is near to all who call, who call from their hearts. The desires of those who fear God are Fulfilled; their cries are heard; they are saved.**

John 11:24-26 Jesus said, "**I am the resurrection and the life; all who believe in me, though they die yet shall they live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."**

Revelation 1:17-18 **Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore.**

Isaiah 41:10 **Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious hand.**

Romans 6: 2-5 **When we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into Christ's death. By our baptism, then, we were buried with Christ and shared Christ's death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of God, so too we might live a new life. For if we have been united with Christ in a death like Christ's, we shall certainly be united with Christ in a resurrection like Christ's.**

Revelation 14:13 **Blessed are the dead who die in Christ, "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "That they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"**

We have only one member who has passed in the last church year, Eugene (Gene) Ganschinietz. Gene's wife, Sue, will receive a white rose after his name is called and a chime is heard.
We will pause now so all of you have the opportunity to come forward and light a votive from the Christ candle to remember other loved ones who have left your life. Sue will assist you.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY: Our inheritance in Jesus Christ prompts us to share the riches of good news with the world. Our pledges and extra gifts witness to the Word of truth, to the gospel of salvation. Because we have received so much, we seek to use our resources among those who hunger for physical or spiritual food. Let us give generously.

OFFERTORY: "Just a Closer Walk with Thee"
Stewart Landon

***DOXOLOGY:**
Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING:**
Generous God, please receive these gifts from the position of love to elevate the position of our neighbor, our witness, and our faith community. Magnify them and bless us as we give. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 299 "For All the Saints"**
***BENEDICTION:**
Rejoice and be glad and spread the love of God, the peace of God, and the sweet communion of God wherever you go. Amen.

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE: 571**

O God of Love, O God of Peace
Make wars throughout the world to cease.
The wrath of human wrong restrain;
Give peace, O God, give peace again.

THE BELL RINGS:

POSTLUDE: "Thanks Be to God" Ernest H. Sheppard

PRAYER LIST: Terry Gammon, Bruce Wagner**,** Cindy Jablonski**,** Jim Warning**,** Kim Holmes, Becky Ballard, Russ Hartmann, Marilyn Paul, Mary Lou and Urban Baum, Pam and Syd Safriet, Yvonne Weber, Jackie Canterbury, Wayne Huss, Liv. C., Nate Hbich, **our Beloved Country.**