

St. John's UCC, Fredericksburg  
November 4, 2012

**"Communion With The Saints"  
(Isaiah 25:6-9, Revelation 21:6-9; John 11:32-44)**

I have always found All Saints' Sunday to be a very special and meaningful worship service, which is why I decided to end my time as your pastor in November. We not only take the time to remember our loved ones who have departed from this life over the past year, but we look at how we are connected with the saints of the past, present, and future. We often think of a saint as a person who has done great things, who may be pictured in a stained glass window or someone who has been declared a saint by the Church, most notably the Roman Catholic Church. However, it is important for us this day to be mindful of another definition of a saint, "one who is a dead sinner, revised and edited."

In a little while we will read the names of the saints who have departed this life and have returned to their Creator since last year's celebration. It is amazing that we are celebrating the lives of 32 people...that's the most we have celebrated in my tenure. Some of the family members may be thinking that their loved one wasn't a saint, but I want to tell you that they were. As children of God we are all saints and today we celebrate the fact that we are in communion with all of the saints who have gone before, who are with us in this place today, and the ones yet to come!

We celebrate the lives of the faithful, both living and dead, for whom the new Jerusalem that Neal read about in Revelation is their final destiny. Today's passage is the first segment of a lengthy vision of the new Jerusalem and there is no mention in this passage of the saints who inhabit the new Jerusalem. It contains wonderful

imagery that ultimately depicts the fact that God's presence is fully realized. Verse 3 says, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them..." In this new Jerusalem is the fulfillment of the prophetic hopes...there will be no more tears, mourning, pain, crying or death. We also heard this from the prophet Isaiah, "Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth..."

That same voice says to John, "See, I am making all things new....It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." The new creation that was started in Christ has now come to fruition. God is the source and purpose of history...God doesn't bracket history and time, but rather God is present with us now and in the life to come. God is the God of the living and of the dead...it is through God that we are connected...that we are in communion with all of the saints.

Our mourning and grieving continues today as we read the names of our loved ones who are no longer with us, but wait for us to join them with all of the saints in heaven. We find hope in the promise of the resurrection and eternal life with Almighty God and the company of saints.

The gospel lesson provides us with the raising of Lazarus, which is a prelude to the great Easter event of Jesus' resurrection. In this powerful scene, we find the hope that Christ will give life to all who believe. Therefore, as we gather here today to remember our loved ones we are given the promise of the resurrection and the new life given to us through Christ. It is through Christ that death ends and life begins!

A boy and his father were traveling in a car when a bee flew through the open window. The boy was allergic to bee stings and so both the father and the boy knew that his life was in danger. As the boy frantically jumped around and tried to avoid the agitated bee, the father calmly reached out and grabbed the bee. When he opened his hand, the bee began to fly again, terrorizing the boy again. The father then said, "Look, son," holding up a hand with an implanted stinger, "his stinger is gone; he can't hurt you any longer." As the bee lost its stinger when it stung the boy, so death lost its sting when it stung Jesus. Today we are called to boldly proclaim the good news that death is swallowed up in the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Another significant moment when I have experienced God's presence during my pastorate here was every Easter morning when we gathered at Cedar Hill Cemetery. One might question why an Easter sunrise service would be held in the cemetery....a place filled with tombstones that identify people who have gone from this life to their eternal life. It is a place where dead people reside. However, I want to think about it in a different way. Rather than saying it is a place of death, let us say that it is a place of life...it is a place where we are in communion with all of the saints who have gone before us. I find it intriguing to look at the tombstones and to think about their life on earth. It is at that moment when we realize that Christ provides life for us on both sides of the grave....here and in the hereafter!

Today we will read the names of loved ones who have tasted death and now enjoy the promise of eternal life. We are grateful for the vision of a place where there is no more crying or pain, but a place where there is joy and dancing. As we

receive the sacrament of Holy Communion today we not only commune with those who are in this sanctuary, but we commune with all of the saints in heaven and on earth, with the saints who have gone before us and the saints who are yet to come! Isaiah talked about a feast where all participate in the meal in order to commune with one another and with God. This is exactly what happens at the Lord's table today....it is truly a communion of the saints. Then we will be fed spiritually in order to proclaim the good news that death is swallowed up and that this is the Lord for whom we have waited. Therefore, let us be glad and rejoice in the salvation that the Lord gives to all the saints! Amen.