

# *“Blessed Are You”*

*Daniel 7:1-3, 15-1, Ephesians 1:11-23, Luke 6:20-31*

The Rev. Dr. Timothy Ahrens  
Senior Minister

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From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: [home@first-church.org](mailto:home@first-church.org)

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

A communion meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, November 3, 2019, All Saints Day, dedicated to our eight members Nancy Jeffrey, Mary Weaver, Marge Parsons, Shirley Calhoun, Margene Whittenburg, Colonel Bill Owen, Martha Loy and Jane Werum and our five friends for whom we held services this past year, Jan Cook, Jim Decker, Roya Pour, Cathy Calhoun, Helen Wilson and all the loved ones of church family who passed to eternal life this past year and for their family, friends and loved ones who miss them so much and always to the glory of God!

*“Blessed Are You”*

*Daniel 7:1-3, 15-1, Ephesians 1:11-23, Luke 6:20-31*

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*Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our salvation.*

*Amen.*

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Born in 1717 in Litzhensk, Poland, Elimelech Weisblum was a great Rabbi and one of the founding rebbes of the Hasidic movement. In fact, he was called “the Rebbe of All Rebbes.” It is said, he was the wisest man of all the sages.

From time to time, Elimelech of Lizhensk would say, *“I will earn eternal life.”* A guest once asked him how he could be so sure he would “earn eternal life.” After all is it not written, *“Be exceedingly humble, for the end of humankind is the worm”* (Pirke Avo, 4:4).

Elimelech replied, *“Never fear, I will earn eternal life.”*

When I arrive at the gates of heaven, they will ask me:

*“Did you learn enough Torah?”* I will say, *“No.”*

Then they will ask, *“Did you pray with enough fervor?”* I will say, *“No.”*

And then they will ask, *“Well, did you fulfill the other commandments as you should have?”* I will say, *“No.”*

Finally, they will ask, *“What of your good deeds?”* I will say, *“I had none.”*

And then they will say: *“An honest man, come in, come in.”*

(found in Day by Day, by Chaim Stern, p. 196).

At the feet of the sages, we come to rest this morning. Here we are humbled by what scripture and wisdom we have not learned, what prayers we have not offered, what commandments we have not fulfilled and what good deeds we have never done.

We come to learn from one another and those who have gone before us to the gates of heaven this past year. The thirteen we lift up in prayer to God today were a true blend of humanity – of all ages, faiths, beliefs, and conditions of life. All faced great loss and hardship. All experienced the fullness of joy and bliss.

Eleven of thirteen were women and two were men. They were

rich and poor. They were all highly educated in the school of life and all well-educated in great institutions of higher learning. One was in her 50's, three in their early 60's, one in her mid-70's, three in their late-80's, and five in their 90's – two were close to 100 years old. Each one was a child of God. To quote Elimelech, *“each one earned eternal life.”*

**Jan Cook** died way too young at 54 years old. She lived apart from the hustle and bustle of our times. She loved the outdoors. She loved gardening and being in nature. She was brilliant, determined and passionate about life. *For Jan, thanks be to God.*

**Nancy Jeffrey** was not born and raised in Columbus but she gave her life to Columbus. In the end, she gave all of us the Washington Gladden Social Justice Park through her generosity of heart. She died only 13 days after it opened and was dedicated. *“Do it with thy might”* was Nancy's motto and life creed. As her daughters said, *“mom had the head of an executive and the heart of a mom.”* With love and commitment, Nancy Jeffrey took on the world with her might every day. *For Nancy, thanks be to God.*

**Mary Weaver** survived cancer at 36 years old. She never took her victory over cancer for granted. She was always grateful for all the doctors, family and friends who saw her through. And in her deep gratitude for life, she lived life every day to the fullest. She lived her life with a song in her heart. Her amazing sense of

herself, sense of humor, and her love for life shined through to all of us each day of her life. *For Mary, thanks be to God.*

**Marge Parsons** was a special woman. She was thoughtful, prayerful meditative, compassionate, kind, creative, supportive, fun, funny and curious about life. She was a wonderful grandmother. She loved children and caregiving for them. She was amazing. *For Marge, thanks be to God.*

**Cathy Calhoun's** intellectual curiosity, independence and compassion recognized no boundary geographically, spiritually, and ethnically. Cathy was in the first wave of women to graduate from [Yale University](#) in 1978. She spoke several different languages including Arabic. Cathy's kind and gentle spirit is missed by all. *For Cathy, thanks be to God.*

Only 65 days after her daughter Cathy died from early onset of Alzheimer's Disease, **Shirley Calhoun** earned eternal life. She died of a broken heart. Shirley was brilliant, incredibly well read, curious, deeply insightful, compassionate and connected to life. From the littlest sprout in the springtime in her beautiful garden to the greatest literature in world history, to appreciating and understanding global art in special ways, Shirley lived long and well. *For Shirley, thanks be to God.*

**Marge Whittenburg** loved all of God's creation. She especially loved cats. She was spiritual, prayerful, compassionate and kind. She sang in the choir for many years and loved life. She had a wonderful sense of humor and a delightful demeanor in the face

of much hardship. Even while she struggled to breathe in the last weeks of her life, she stayed positive and remained joyful. *For Margene, thanks be to God.*

In Revelation 2:9-10 we read, “*have no fear of whatever it is you face. Do not fear what you must go through. But, be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life.*” **Jim Decker** embodied this spirit of Revelation 2. He was a deeply faithful man. He was faithful to God. He was faithful to his church – First Community Church for 49 years. He was faithful to his family - his nephews and nieces. He was faithful to wife Ruth for 53 years. He was faithful to his friends and to the music of his soul. *For Jim, thanks be to God.*

**Martha Loy** was a wonderful and loving wife, mother, and grandmother. She was active in Columbus with the Symphony Orchestra, her sorority and our church. She saw the beauty and goodness in other people. She sought excellence in faith and service throughout her lifetime. Martha really loved this church and when she was able she was in church every Sunday praying to God and giving her life to God in service to others. *For Martha, thanks be to God.*

**Colonel William (Bill) Van Brocklin Owen, Jr.**, at the time of his death in July was one of the last soldiers of World War II to pass from this life to eternal life. He flew 34 combat missions over Germany in WWII and others nicknamed him “Lucky.” He led the first bombing mission over Berlin on March 4, 1944. After WWII Bill went on to pilot combat missions in Korea and

Vietnam as well. He was truly one of the greatest America war pilots in history. He was honored many times by the United States Air Force and the military. Here at First Church he loved working to fix and improve our building. He loved this church! But, his greatest claim to fame was his lifelong love for Jackie Owen, the love of his life. He was brave beyond measure and loved deeply beyond measure. *For Bill, thanks be to God.*

**Helen Wilson** had a remarkable life. Born and raised on a cattle farm in New Mexico in December 1920, Helen became a nurse, a mother, and a woman who served God, her nation and this congregation with all her heart. When Helen saw a need, she met it. She was passionate about life and she took on each day with love and zeal for doing what was right and what was needed. I believe she was the best and most undaunted Republican we ever had in this congregation. Helen was undaunted in her approach to all things and all people. She lived this way for the entirety of her 98 ½ years. *For Helen, thanks be to God!*

**Roya Pour** died too young of a broken heart. Growing up in Iran, Roya dedicated her life to her daughters and their freedom and then worked so hard to get to the United States. She died trying to get here to be with her daughter Sherry and her daughter-in-law Rezi. She finally came to America to be buried in early September. She was an amazing business woman, lover of life, and joyful presence of God's love in this world. *For Roya, thanks be to God.*

**Jane Werum** died only 13 days ago. Jane was one of a kind. She was our longest tenured member with her baptism in 1926, her confirmation in 1939 and a life of love and service to First Church which spanned 93 years. She was brilliant, a lover of art and literature, a lover of public tv and radio, the Columbus Symphony and the all arts in Columbus. Jane had tremendous perception and insights into life. She worked steadily throughout her lifetime to make this world a better place. We celebrate her life on Monday November 11 in a service here. *For Jane, thanks be to God.*

The wisdom of Elimelech of Lizensk has shown us that humility gifts us with eternal life. The wisdom of Jesus in today's gospel points us to the blessings we come to know in God's love and through which we are called to be a blessing to others.

You and I have been truly graced by the 13 women and men who through 1049 years of living, showed us a blessed pathway to God. We have been touched by their lives and all who have gone before us to show us a way to glory. And through it all, I know that in this room today, so many of you have lost loved ones in the past year. You have buried parents, partners, spouses, siblings and family members whose names and faces are in your heart and on your mind today. I alone have buried my beloved Aunt Ruth and my cousin Don in the past eight months. We have all lost deeply and dearly. For all those who have gone before us into God's eternal home, let us say together – *Thanks be to God!*

At Jan Cook's memorial service last November, we shared a poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox entitled, "*The Things That Count.*" Listen to Ella's words:

## **"The Things That Count"**

by Ella Wheeler Wilcox

*Now, dear, it isn't the bold things,  
Great deeds of valour and might,  
That count the most in the summing up of life at the end of the day.*

*But it is the doing of old things,  
Small acts that are just and right;  
And doing them over and over again, no matter what others say;  
In smiling at fate, when you want to cry, and in keeping at work when you  
want to play—*

*Dear, those are the things that count.*

*And, dear, it isn't the new ways  
Where the wonder-seekers crowd  
That lead us into the land of content, or help us to find our own.  
But it is keeping to true ways,  
Though the music is not so loud,  
And there may be many a shadowed spot where we journey along alone;  
In flinging a prayer at the face of fear, and in changing into a song a  
groan—*

*Dear, these are the things that count.*

*My dear, it isn't the loud part  
Of creeds that are pleasing to God,  
Not the chant of a prayer, or the hum of a hymn, or a jubilant shout or  
song.*

*But it is the beautiful proud part  
Of walking with feet faith-shod;*

*And in loving, loving, loving through all, no matter how things go wrong;  
In trusting ever, though dark the day, and in keeping your hope when the  
way seems long—*

*Dear, these are the things that count.*

May each of us live and love our lives with the things that count.  
By so doing, we will be a blessing in this world and we will join  
Elimelech and Jesus and our loved ones at the gates of heaven.  
Amen.