

# “Generous Resurrection”

*Wisdom 3:1-9; Revelation 21:1-6a;  
John 11:32-44*

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From the Pulpit

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A Communion Meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, All Saints Day, November 1, 2015, dedicated to the memories of Marie Pfeiffer, Georgia Swinger, Marilee Schneider, Jack Davis, Jim Roehm, Gunter Garbe, William Edwards, Chuck Kelley, David Shaver, Amos White, and Rev. Keene Lebold and all our beloved ones who have entered eternal light in the last church year and always to the Glory of God!

***“Generous Resurrection”***

***Wisdom 3:1-9; Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44***

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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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He didn't have to do it. He didn't have to raise Lazarus from the dead.

When Jesus stepped into the small town of Bethany and was immediately surrounded by the grieving sisters of his dear friend Lazarus, he was face-to-face with that terrible truth – some of God's most beautiful children die too young. Lazarus was one of those beautiful ones stricken by

death at too young an age. Mary and Martha were overcome by the **pain of their brother's passing**. Martha met him first. She ran to him on the road and said, "If you had been here he would not have died." Soon after, Mary appeared and said the same words. Both clinging to Jesus **and weeping at his feet, touched Jesus' deepest heart** – so much so that he became angry about the death of his friend and out of his anger, tears flowed freely.

Deeply disturbed and through his tears, Jesus turned to prayer- asking God to raise his friend from the dead. God **heard his son's** despairing voice and saw his tears of anguish and raised Lazarus then and there. It was a glorious and generous resurrection. Only God can raise the dead. On that day, **God's** beloved son was an accomplice to resurrection.

**In the generosity of God's grace**, resurrection came to Lazarus. It is the resurrection of the dead in spirit and truth that draws us together this day. We come to lift up and remember the men and women of our lives who, like Mary **and Martha, we cry out, "they should not have died."** We want them with us. We want to hold on to them still. And so we do the best we can. We remember them with love and lift them on high this day. We pray for their peace- and ours. And we remember their goodness.

I remember – with love- the three women and seven men who entered eternal life from our congregation this past year. They were amazing witnesses of our faith on earth and now are true Saints of God in heaven – resting in the **eternal promises of God's love**. Their losses are personal. Their lives touched us deeply.

As I said in the pastoral epistle this week, I have 20 years of memories of Marie - so many! I remember holding Marie as she went down into the waters of the Jordan River 14 years ago and reaffirmed her baptism in Christ. Marie was a fiery lover of life and never stopped learning and **advocating for education for all God's children**. I remember Georgia Swinger “**passing on home communion**” and with her beautiful eyes smiling and saying “**the real communion is our time together here in my living room.**” I remember Marilee Schneider reading her poetry and sharing her writings with me – writings which celebrated all creation and **God's loving presence in this world and in our lives**. I remember Jack Davis' hugs and affirmations of friendship and love across my 25 years of knowing him and with love and conviction nominating my daughter Sarah as the youngest representative Ohio ever sent the General Synod of the United Church of Christ. I remember Jim Roehm singing songs in German and inviting me to join in – helping me as I stumbled and teaching me the correct

pronunciation of the words. I remember his puns, jokes and cartoons which always brought a smile. I remember Gunter Garbe each Sunday being present in worship as the first man in the sanctuary – centered in silence and prayer, absorbed in the beautiful sound of our choir as they prepared to lead us in worship. I remember him with the children who were drawn to this big bear of a man with the huge hands and huge heart – whose brilliant, creative and playful ways astounded us. I remember Bill Edwards and his joyful smile and delightful way with all people and the way he and Lola jumped into marriage late in life and completely **embraced new love in their 80's and lived and loved for 15 years!** I remember hearing Chuck Kelley before I saw him on the days he was volunteering in the office with laughter and joy he embraced the times he had among us.

I knew Amos and Keene for most of my 30 years in Ohio. Amos White was my roommate at General Synod in Fort Worth Texas in 1989. I remember Amos as my wise and wonderful teacher - always willing to share his knowledge with a smile, with a story and the love of Christ always empowering every word. With amazing strength he overcame physical challenges through many years with faith, hope and love. And I remember Rev. Keene Lebold as a colleague who taught me so much and courage, strength and grace. He was a true friend and mentor and as a life-long

learner always going deeper on our relationships with God, the creation and all people of all faiths- never afraid to go to the edge of theology and wisdom and sharing love with everyone.

**( I ask all the families of those I have mentioned here to rise in remembrance now. Thanks be to God for your beloved ones!)**

These are but passing memories of ten women and men whose collective 823 years on this planet touched hundreds of thousands of people and so many of us. As those who lived generous lives, we pray this All Saints Day that they have been embraced in generous resurrections as well.

In addition, we carry with us today those who were ever so close to us – dear friends and family members who passed to eternal life. For myself, I lost one of my best friends this past year and two aunts as well. I know your stories carry similar tunes in the song of life. I know some of you have lost dearly and deeply beloved parents, family members and friends.

With each, I ask you to remember the goodness of the person. What makes you smile when you think of them? What brings warmth to your heart when you consider their presence in your life? What brings out the generosity of spirit and giving to others in you, when you remember how they embraced the world around them? What can you hang

on to that can make you a better spouse, a family member, a better neighbor, a better friend?

We call this day, November 1<sup>st</sup>, All Saints Day. It is in which we celebrate Resurrection – Generous Resurrection! Author Frederick Buechner writes, “In God’s holy flirtation with the world, God occasionally drops a handkerchief. These handkerchiefs are called saints.” This seems to indicate that saint making is more God’s business than ours. But whether it is through our intentional striving or God’s amazing grace and delicate drop of handkerchiefs, the main thing is, the saints of God exist. They are not imaginary friends. They are really ordinary men and women whose love of God has led them to do extraordinary things which means that none of us can shrug our shoulders and say they simply an artist’s rendering found in statutes and shrines. They are here among us – in spirit and in person. If we but accept the calling to be generous lovers and givers of life in our times, we too step into the glorious resurrected life of God in our times.

This day, we have been called to remember with love those who have gone before us. Through time and space we are united with them forever. We are also called this day be generous in our stewardship. While some may question the unity of All Saints and stewardship, I believe it is a great combination. As we remember we are called to step forward

as generous stewards of the resources God has given us. We are called to **“Step Forward in Hope.”**

In the spirit of those who have gone before us, May we be great stewards and step forward in hope now and in the year to come. Alleluia! Amen.

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