

# *“Blessed Are You”*

*Revelation 7:9-17; Matthew 21:23-32*

*All Saints’ Sunday*

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*November 5, 2017*

From the Pulpit

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*A Communion Meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens at The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, November 5, 2017, All Saints Day Celebration, dedicated to the four men and three women who passed to eternal life in the past year from the membership of First Congregational Church – Harry Guynn, Jr., Sharon Walquist, Sandy Bennett, Frank Hussey, Ray Pendell, Evalyn Shaheen, Don Erickson – also to Dr. Ruth Sitler and Dr. David Kellermeyer, to all who mourn their loved ones, to all the saints of our church down through the ages and always to the glory of God!*

***“Blessed Are You”***

***Revelation 7:9-17; Matthew 12:23-32***

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

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In the past month, my family and I have laid two of our family members to rest – my wife’s mother, Dr. Ruth Sitler and my mother’s brother, Dr. David Kellermeyer. Ruth was a pilot, a professor of flight and the first woman to lead a university flight program in this nation. David was a church

musician, composer and professor of music. Each brought life, love, adventure and praise of God to life. Each was a person of prayer and dedicated their lives to others.

Like our family, I know many of your families have “lost large” this past year. And I would add, one cannot put a calendar date on death and loss and grief and say, “this is where it begins and this is where it ends.” It takes time to mend a broken heart. Loss is loss. The TIME of “Large Loss” is hard to define and leaves a space seemingly impossible to fill.

Spouses, partners, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, friends and more have died and passed to eternal life. You have lost large. The death of one so close to us leaves a hole in our soul. While we seek to cling to the memories we have, and other memories come to us from sources beyond us, there is nothing like the memory of the senses – the hug, the kiss, the scent, the sight, the voice, the tender touch and tender words of one who loves us and whom we love.

Like countless billions before our loved ones left this earthly, physical realm, our beloved ones have entered the place where all God’s people gather in peace. And in our living, we are sustained by the promise of resurrection to eternal life. It is my

hope and my faith – and my deepest heartfelt prayer – that Ruth and David and each of our beloved ones have been raised to the realm of glory – to eternal life, light, and love with their Savior and the host of heavenly saints.

Until the day when we are reunited with them in a heavenly reunion, we are called to remember them.

I will forever remember Harry Guynn – servant of God who built to serve, built to drive and built to last (a two-time Deacon!). I will remember his consistent question to me, “Rev. Tim, how can I help you?” We will forever remember, Harry D. Guynn, Jr.

I will forever remember Dr. Sandy Bennett – whom the Deacons continue to list as one of their own each month when they meet. She was a woman who showed up and served others. Her heart was full of love. She always found the goodness of others and celebrated them. I called Sandy the Johnny Appleseed of Extravagant Welcome. She was amazing. We will forever remember Dr. Sandra Jean Williams Bennett.

I will forever remember Sharon Walquist. Sharon “kept the pathway clear” – something she learned from her mother in childhood. When I asked Sharon just before her death what made a good choir member, she said softly, “Listen and follow

your leader.” That sounds like the definition of discipleship. We will forever remember Sharon Patricia Scott Walquist.

I will forever remember Frank Hussey. He was a Gentle Gentleman. Born with music in his bones, Frank lived his faith with confident clarity and modeled the way of Jesus – gentle, compassionate, humble and kind. In fact, he would be terribly embarrassed that I just talked about him so much on All Saints’ Sunday. It was only two years ago yesterday that his beloved Carol died. So, to the children and grandchildren of Carol and Frank, our hearts go out to you on such close losses of your parents/grandparents. We will forever remember Frank L. Hussey.

I will forever remember Ray Pendell. Ray’s smile could light up a room. His presence of God’s light and love was ever-present. Ray was a long-time member of First Church – joining in 1960. He was superintendent of Sunday School for years and an usher for 50 years. Ray loved life! He loved Buckeye Football. And even today, after their huge loss yesterday, Ray would say, “Stick with them. Believe in them. They will be back.” We will forever remember Raymond A. Pendell.

In the past four days God has called two more of our beloved ones home – Donald Erickson and Evalyn Shaheen. We will remember Don in a service here at First Church celebrating his life this Thursday, November 9 at 11 a.m. Evalyn will be remembered in a service on November 13 at 1 p.m. But, let me say that Don died much too young at 58 years old. Evalyn lived a long life – 96 years old. To Kate and Grace and Melissa, our prayers are with you as your hearts have broken. Your husband and father was a magnificent man – full of love, laughter, fun and joy. We will forever remember Don Erickson.

Evalyn loved this church. In her last years, she was with her daughter in Texas and enjoyed being close to the grandchildren and great-grandchildren there. She is truly coming home to Ohio this week. We will forever remember Evalyn Shaheen.

Let us forever remember Harry, Sandy, Sharon, Frank, Ray, Don and Evalyn. May their blessedness live on in us.

As we prepare to come to the Table of Memory and Hope, the Table of God's Grace embodied by Christ, we are given a gift from the gospel today. It is the gift of the Beatitudes, the blessings. Here Jesus calls his followers (including us!) to be blessed and be a blessing to others. *"Blessed are the poor in*

*spirit...blessed are they that mourn... blessed are the meek...blessed are the ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness... blessed are the merciful... blessed are the pure in heart... blessed are the peacemakers... blessed are those persecuted for doing what is right in this world.”*

He delivers this powerful package of blessings in the midst of a crowd – not in a garden with the tight circle of disciples, or a little house with a few close friends, but on the hillside with thousands before him. Crowds always moved Jesus.

Sometimes he was moved to great compassion by the crowds.

At other times, their disbelief aroused his pity. Sometimes their selfishness caused him to wonder if they were following him only for loaves and fishes. Their sickness and illnesses gnawed at his heart. And their lostness and confusion filled him with a desire to show them the way to truth and how to live a truth-*full* life. In spite of all this, Jesus loved them.

(Jordan, Clarence, The Sermon on the Mount, A Koinonia Publication from Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA, fourth printing, 1973, p. 20).

I have written and preached extensively on the Beatitudes.

Today, I want to focus on one, the second one: *The mourners are the ones who are partakers of the divine blessing, for they are the ones who will be strengthened.*

Why does Jesus want people to mourn? Doesn't he see that religion has way too much sadness already? Does he really think we are going to heaven by crying about it? What is he thinking?

First, we must remember, to mourn is not necessarily to shed tears - although weeping is a part of mourning. To mourn is to "*express a deep concern*" – that is actually what the word means – "to express deep concern." One way to express deep concern is with tears. Another is with prayers. To mourn in community acknowledges that you are deeply concerned about the way things are. For those of us seek the kingdom of God, our tears are eventually turned into motion – we are moved to act. In stepping up and stepping out of our lives, we need to be "comforted" or "strengthened" to move out into the world.

In community, mourners come to know they are loved, embraced by prayer, strengthened and encouraged. Jesus understood this!

You see, mourning is always about death, but it not always about the dying of a person. You may mourn a relationship that has ended; a job that has ended; the end of your physical strength; or perhaps the death of a dream about the way you imagined life would be for you – in marriage, in faith, in vocation, even in parenting. Help us, gracious God to feel



deep concern so that we may be strengthened to take action on behalf of ourselves and others who have lost large. *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be strengthened.*

I close with these thoughts adapted from Ray Pendell's service just a few weeks ago. Rev. Corzine shared that in times of change and loss, God gives us gifts to sustain us, two gifts in particular. The first is the gift of memory. The gift of memory looks back in time...The gift of memory looks back. The second gift God gives us is the gift of hope. The gift of hope looks forward. Hope is a gift from God, grounded in God, in the life of Jesus.

Hope helps us shoulder our grief today, as well as any griefs that have come before. The Reformed tradition, which this church represents, offers specific words about hope, in the face of death. The words from this tradition are "*In sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ.*" (as quoted from Rev. Emily Corzine, Memorial Service for Ray Pendell, October 16, 2017, First Congregational Church, UCC, Columbus, Ohio).

Today, we once again commend all the lives of our loved ones to Almighty God.

Blessed are you – the bearers of Memory and Hope. Let us celebrate these gifts as we come to the table. Thanks be to God! Amen.

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