

A communion meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Senior Minister of the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, November 2, 2008, All Saints Day, 25th Sunday after Pentecost, dedicated to all the saints who have died unto the Lord in this year, and always to the glory of God!

“What Does God Require?”

I John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

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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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A Persian Proverb says, “We come into this world crying while all around us are smiling. May we so live that we go out of this world smiling,”

Today we celebrate All Saints’ Day (on the calendar for November 1). Today is a wonderful day to smile on earth with those who are smiling in heaven. Today we remember not only the 11 members of First Church, but all our beloved ones who have died unto the Lord in this past year.

When I think of each one of our beloved, I smile with joy. Each one touched my life immeasurably. I performed Rich Gibson and Tim Kocheiser’s covenant service 11 years ago. Later, my family met the airplane returning from China with Brianna Kocheiser-Gibson on board as Tim and Rich brought her home. They were planning to join our church, when, on December 5, Rich dropped over dead while making a Christmas gift delivery for UPS at 53 years old. Thanks be to God for Rich Gibson, child of God and beloved member of this

church, so named 10 days after his death. His quiet way was sunshine in the darkness of this world.

Allan Wingfield was a long-time member of this church who died just after Christmas last year. He was an interior decorator whose brilliance brought color and beauty to our church and many homes and businesses in Central Ohio. I smile when I think of Molly and Allan peacefully present during so many of our times together across the years. Thanks be to God for Allan Wingfield, beloved member whose smile and pleasant way lit up every room he ever entered.

William Heer, II was a business man, a creative genius and a dedicated son of this church. He was the only usher I remember bold enough to wear a fisherman's hat when serving by the east door at 9th St. After all, wasn't Jesus a fisher of men? How appropriate! Sunday after Sunday, he tipped his hat to me and smiled. He is smiling still. Recently, we received a check for \$10,000 from his estate to support the care of this church. I stand in awe of his generosity to the church he loved. Thanks be to God for the life and faith of William Heer, II.

Smiles defined the life and faith of Celestine Clarke. She was almost 97 years old when she died in February. A teacher of children in church and school all her life, she was a gifted woman of prayer! This church called me to serve as senior minister in November 1999. But it was Celestine who "anointed" me in an Eastside Fellowship meeting in the spring of 2000. She called upon the Holy Spirit to descend upon me, bless me and keep me, Susan and the children safe from all harm. When Celestine Clarke prayed, the heavens opened and the voice of God entered one of God's most gracious, loving and gentle spirits! She moved to America later in life to support her daughter and granddaughter. I counted her among the earthly saints long before she entered God's realm of glory. Thanks be to God for the witness, faith and light of Celestine Clarke.

Louise "Lou" Smith was one of my favorites. Her mind and spirit always found a way forward when there was no way to go. She was an environmentalist, a writer, a creative genius, a wonderful mother and

wife, and a great lover of First Church, especially our staff and our music. A few years ago, Lou handed me a presentation she had written on Martin Luther. It was brilliant. No one in this church took more interest in my wife and children than Lou Smith. She was a witness to God's light. Some of you have heard the story of our last home communion. Orange juice took the place of grape juice because I had mistakenly put the wrong bag in my car. We used the elements that Wib had in the refrigerator. It was orange juice. Lou was quite weak and nearing death, but as she received the OJ she opened her eyes and said, "This is good. Where has it been all these years?" Laughter and love are added to smiles when I think of Lou. Thanks be to God for the love, grace and peace of Louise Smith.

Amy Allen is deeply missed. At 94 and a half years old, she died unto the Lord. Amy revolutionized the education of college students caring for persons with disabilities in the state of Ohio and the nation. While at Ohio University, she transformed our state's plan to care for special needs children in public schools. Each Thursday and Sunday for many years, she drove from Athens, Ohio, to sing in our church choir. She only stopped ascending the steps to the gallery when her hearing gave out. She was one of the most dedicated volunteers of this church. Brilliant in every way, Amy was able to give her entire life to those who were forgotten and forsaken because of their disabilities. God gave this gentle and yet fierce defender of justice the ability to change our world. Thanks be to God for Amy Allen.

F. Sterling Smith was an artist and writer, a teacher of artists, a creative genius, a fine athlete, a fun-loving father and husband. He was independent and an explorer of this world. In 91 years, he lived well and loved deeply. At his reception, students across many generations of his teaching gave testimonies to his excellence in teaching about life and art. Thanks be to God for the life and witness of F. Sterling Smith.

Ben Bechtel was a remarkable man and a friend of so many of us at First Church. Speaking of smiles, Ben's could change your day. He battled his cancer for several years, far outliving his prognosis. He

persevered through pain by creating and building and playing the music he loved, the music that was inside of him. He had three careers – early music musician, teacher and builder of instruments – not the least of which is the Bechtel Harpsichord that was dedicated in April 2008. Ben was dear to my heart. Now his is the music of the spheres. His is the music of angels. Thanks be to God for Ben Bechtel.

Wallace Cannon was in every sense of the word cool. He was a cool leader and cool under pressure. He quietly went about changing the world around him through his consistent and perseverant ways. He was a deeply faithful and wise elder of this congregation. When I once asked him the meaning of something that had happened, he reminded me that God had elected me to serve as a pastor and God had ordained this calling. No man or woman could change that. Then with his smile, he assured me that all would be well. Wallace Cannon was one of a kind. Like Bill Heer on the East Transcept, Wallace is missed as an usher on the west side. Thanks be to God for this amazing witness of faith!

Marian Guynn was a coal miner's daughter from western Pennsylvania, who married Harry 56 years ago and throughout her life brought smiles and joy to her family. In the past three years she suffered with Alzeheimer's disease, a disease that finally claimed her life. Marian was a beautiful woman, whose delightful way set everyone around her at ease. She died early last month. As we remember her, let us rejoice in the way she lived and loved. Thanks be to God for Marian Guynn.

I did not forget William "Bill" Willis. I saved Bill for last purposely. Bill was a spiritual father to me. For reasons that are very deep and personal, I can only tell you that I grieve his passing still today.

As one of the first three African-Americans to break the color barrier in the current National Football League in 1946, Bill set the pace for generations of men to follow on the gridiron. His integrity, his

courage, his love for life, his love for all people (especially young people), his gentle fierceness, his quiet calm, all of this and more changed me and changed many people through the years. One year ago this weekend, Bill's number 99 was retired forever at Ohio Stadium. A good number of us were on the field that day at his request. Twenty-three days later, Bill was gone.

At his funeral, Bishop Timothy Clarke said, "When Bill gets to heaven our savior, will recognize him from the spike marks in his back. Surely our savior will say, 'Well, done good and faithful servant.'" I proudly wear number 99 today in memory of Bill. Thanks be to God for Bill Willis.

How about you? Whom do you remember today? Whom are you missing this All Saints Sunday? In a moment, I will ask you to stand together and remember with love those who have touched your life and gone before us to heaven. I hope you are able to place their names on your lips and breathe them aloud. I hope you come to the table of grace with their spirits and their faith surrounding you this day.

The sermon title asks, "What does God require?" Matthew's Beatitudes tell us, in Jesus' words, that we are blessed when we are poor in spirit, mournful in the face of grief, humble of heart, hungry and thirsting for what is just and right in this world, merciful in word and deed, pure in our hearts of love, peacemakers and not warmakers, and when we face persecution, reviling and handle evil words against us.

When I look at the saints of God who are smiling upon us this day, I smile. Because, like Jesus, I can rejoice and be glad in the reward they have greatly received in heaven. They are witnesses to the light of God. May we be witnesses to God's light, too! This is the place. Now is the time that God has chosen for us to shine. Thanks be to God! Alleluia! Amen.

