

“An Endless Alleluia!”

Job 19:23-27; II Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17; Luke 20:27-38

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From the Pulpit

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A sermon delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy Ahrens, Senior A
Communion Meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C.
Ahrens, Senior Minister, The First Congregational United Church
of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, All Saints Day, November 6, 2022,
dedicated to the memory of Rev. Earl Fritz, Donice Wooster, Vicky
Kutschbach, Ruth Allred, Paul Flocken, Ed Koetz, Tammy Anderson,
and Barbara Knox who all passed to eternal life this last year and
always to the glory of God!

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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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For a few minutes today, I want you to think that Luke 20:27-38 is
not set in a First Century Synagogue in Palestine but a 21st Century
church in America. We are caught in a debate around eternal life
and resurrection. On the one side, there are Biblical Literalists who
believe every word of the Bible as written is true. On the other
side, there are Biblical Liberals who are open to understandings of
scripture and life that come from beyond the confines of the 66
books of the Bible.

In the middle you have Jesus. Jesus is the new kid on the block – the new pastor who has arrived from rural Nebraska. The two sides want to find out what the kid is made of so the Biblical Literalists present him with a riddle – trying to trap him.

Has this ever happened to you? Someone tries to get you into an argument over your beliefs? I've had many encounters like this. Somebody comes to me and asks me a question about the Bible, or something of a theological nature. It doesn't happen as often as you might think, but it has happened.

How I respond is largely based on what I think is the motive of the person who is doing the asking. Is the person an honest seeker of the truth, or is this person trying to get me to perpetuate a belief that he/she had for a long time and has no intention of changing? It's generally the latter, and I suspect that's the way it was for Jesus when he was confronted by the religious leadership in Jerusalem. They weren't interested in seeking truth. They were interested in trapping him to prove themselves right about their beliefs. There they were sticking a riddle under Jesus' nose thinking they could trap him about his view of heaven and resurrection. It didn't work.

So, what is Jesus saying about heaven? Despite what your beliefs might be about the life after this existence, Jesus says that the life to come is not simply a continuation of this present existence. If it were, I would think there are plenty of people on earth for whom such a prospect would not be a positive one. Jesus says that God is the God of the living, and guess what? In saying this, he quotes scripture and the Biblical literalists are mad at how he does it and the Biblical Liberals are not satisfied either.

But what does it mean that God is the God of the living? We can buy that, believe in it with all our heart. What we want to know is, what kind of living is it going to be? We want answers. We want clear, unequivocal images of heaven that will encourage and sustain us. Honestly, we want a rational explanation of heaven. But that's not what the Bible is for – according to Jesus. The Bible doesn't rationally explain heaven. The Bible talks about the life to come as mystery, that what we can see is like looking through a dark and murky glass dimly as Paul writes about. It is not crystal clear. It is an absolute mystery.

What I think Jesus is saying is that those who are willing to give their lives to God now will find God to be there when this journey of life is over. What we will discover there is beyond our wildest imaginations, but it will be life as God created it to be, and all our wondering about it, our conjectures, our images, won't make a bit of difference. It all comes down to a matter of faith, doesn't it? It is simply and finally a matter of faith.

Today, we gather to recognize the people in our congregation who gave themselves to God in faith. All their lives came down to a matter of faith. It is not our purpose today (or any day for that matter) to question the amount of faith they had or even the way they expressed it as good or bad. Our purpose is to look at our own lives of faith even as we focus on them.

Pastor Earl Martin Fritz died on All Saints' Day in the afternoon – one year ago on this Sunday. He died at home with his wife Pauline and his son John at his side. Earl and Pauline were married for 70 years. Ordained in 1955 in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Earl lived a life of love, friendship, and faithfulness. Earl

was a Lutheran pastor through and through serving actively for more than 50 years and supplied preaching the rest of life. He was one of the finest pastor's I have ever known. Earl's greatest pleasures in life were vacation hiking in the mountains, climbing 14,000 ft peaks, and listening to the music of organs and symphonies. He enhanced several homes with his stain glass windows and built his home in Gahanna. The community and welfare organizations had been hallmarks of his life. He was loved and admired by all. For all of us who were blessed to know him, there is so much to say about Earl. He was a magnificent man.

Thanks be to God for Earl Fritz.

Donice Wooster died one week after Earl in November 2021.

Donice spent 23 years at the Preschool of First Community Church: first as a teacher, and later as Director of Early Childhood Ministry. She touched the lives of thousands of parents and children through her mentorship of parenting groups and her research and writing on child development. She continued to support people after her retirement, especially through her work with the Jung Association of Central Ohio. She was a loving mother, nana, sister, and friend to people across generations. She loved music and art, OSU women's basketball, knitting, and walks in nature preserves. We were blessed that she was a member of First Church in her last years and she was a Deacon of Church at the time of her death.

Thanks be to God for Donice Wooster.

Vicky Ellen Kutschbach died on Christmas Eve 2021. Vicky was married to Bill at here at First Church on December 14, 1974. Vicky was full of joy! She was very active in many philanthropic & Fraternal organizations through the years. And she loved to travel – including many trips and cruises through the years. She took her grandkids on

a Disney Cruise two years ago, which she enjoyed as much, if not more, than they did! Vicky loved all children, especially her son and grandchildren. She was very kind and thoughtful toward everyone and went out of her way to assist in any way possible. She loved angels, pixies, sunsets, clouds rainbows and especially Christmas and Santa. Vicky loved life!

Thanks be to God for Vicky Kutschbach.

Ruth Allred was a member of First Church for 25 years. Until her move to Texas, she was active here all the time – quietly and thoughtfully calling on those who were sick and often forgotten by others. As Senior Deacon, I remember meeting with Ruth regularly to plan the Deacon’s activities and plan worship. She would say to me, “How may we serve First Church and support you as our Senior Deacon?” I was always touched by her gentle, quiet and clear way. She brought her grandchildren Ben and Jansen to church and we were all blessed by their presence among us as well. She was a GREAT grandmother. For the last years of her life, Ruth moved to Texas to be closer to her family there. She was blessing to my life and all who knew her.

Thanks be to God for Ruth Allred.

Paul Flocken was diagnosed as a young teen with a life threatening kidney disease. But Paul was the recipient of a miracle – healed by faith, his kidney disease disappeared – and he was able to move on and start a full and exciting life. Paul’s adventures began when he was 17 and entered the Army. During two tours of Viet Nam in the 82nd Airborne Division, he was crew chief for medical evacuation helicopters. Without regard for his own life, he was fiercely determined to rescue injured soldiers in the field of battle. As a result of his bravery and skill, he was presented with the Bronze

Star Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry. As a Sergeant in the Army, Paul went on to become a jump master as a Paratrooper and a scuba diving master while stationed with the UN Peacekeeping forces in Egypt.

Here at First Church, Paul was always very active in our life together as a deacon and usher. He would always ask me, “How may I help you today, Rev. Ahrens?” On any given Sunday, you could see Paul warmly welcoming people to First Church while also silently guarding the Broad Street doors. He was a true servant of God who sought to give his life in love to Jesus Christ. He would cook and serve meals; care for the homeless poor; lead and serve at the Bethlehem on Broad Street Christmas celebration for the poor. Paul was active in book and Bible studies and was ecumenical in all ways – a long-time member of Cum Christo and home-builder with Habitat for Humanity. Paul was a soldier for Christ and a servant of God!

Thanks Be to God for Paul Flocken.

Ed Koetz was our longest standing member at the time of his death in April. Ed met the love of his life, Marilyn, when they were 15 and they married at First Congregational Church when they were 19 – in 1946. Ed owned and operated W.E. Davis Insurance Company beginning in 1962 and it is still family owned 60 years later. Ed loved to work with his hands and kept active by gardening and remodeling projects. Ed was a long-time member of the First Congregational Church and served as a deacon, trustee, Sunday school teacher, and hosted the 60+ Group with Marilyn. Married 66 years, Marilyn and Ed loved their family, which resulted in many family traditions: Friday nights babysitting the grandkids, hosting family dinners every Sunday,

and yearly vacations to the Florida beach where he and Marilyn had a condo for many years. For our longest term member –
Thanks be to God for Ed Koetz.

Tammy Anderson died suddenly and way too young at the age of 53. Tammy was active at First Church for many years. She was always present and supportive of all things related to children's and youth ministry. We will always remember her special support of the Annual Cookie Mission, the Spring Retreat Crafts, Sunday School support and more. You could find her behind the scenes supporting this church in humble and kind ways. She was fun and funny. Tammy was a light to this community of faith – shining to us from her heart of love. Tammy was married to Eddie Anderson III and was mother to Morghan, Eddie IV, and Chutney, and grandmother to Eddie Mykl and Nihcollette. Her family misses her most of all.

Thanks be to God for Tammy Anderson.

Barbara Knox entered eternal life on October 1st. Married to David for more than 60 years, Barbara was a great woman. Quietly, thoughtfully, prayerfully and lovingly, Barbara lived her life as a testimony to art, beauty, and what was good and true in this world. She was active as a docent at the Columbus Museum of Art and was here each week in worship for many years – until her health declined and she was not able to leave Westminster Thurber to join us. She was active in our book studies and edited my Bible Study, “Acts Comes Alive: 12 Keys for Reviving the Church.” One of my favorite memories of Barbara was her coming into my office one day and taking me next door to see an art exhibition she didn't want me to miss. She said, “you spend too much time with your books and deep thoughts. Come and see the splendor of God's artistic creation!” She

took me by the hand and walked me through the galleries – one of the best afternoons of my years here. Barbara was a gift from God.
Thanks be to God for Barbara Knox.

Today, we give thanks for these eight shining lights of love in our lives. We also give thanks for all the saints of our lives who have pointed us to a way of living and giving that brings hope to each day. Today, ours should be an endless Alleluia! For all the saints, we say,
thanks be to God! Amen.

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The opening part of this sermon was drawn from “Seven Weddings and a Funeral” Dr. Randy L. Hyde, Sermon Writer. *Resources for Lectionary Preaching*, 2007.

