

This is November 22, 2020...25th Sunday of Pentecost & the Last Sunday of the Church Year

**On behalf of the family of faith at Community United Church of Christ, Medford, WI,
welcome to this time of worship!**

“No matter who you are or where you are on your life’s journey, you are welcome here!”

During today’s worship, we will remember those who have passed away during this last year.

If you have a candle that you would like to light in their memory, please have it ready!

Next Sunday, Advent begins. At each Sunday service during Advent, I will light one of the 4 Advent candles on the wreath in the sanctuary. If you have a “real” Advent wreath with candles at home, or have separate candles, or a “crafty” wreath on which to glue a flame...please have it ready next Sunday. On Wednesdays during Advent, there will be short prayer services posted and also added to the weekly mailings. Any questions?

Please call me. We will celebrate Advent together, though apart!

Call to Worship (Please say outloud: “We give you thanks.”

Eternal God, for those who have run the race of faith before us
and now surround us like a cloud of witnesses, **we give you thanks.**

For those who pass the word of your love to each new generation, **we give you thanks.**

For the our families of all shapes and sizes, **we give you thanks.**

Hymn: “*For All the Saints*” vs.1&3, #529 (Public Domain)

Verse 1: For all the saints who from their labors rest,
who thee by faith before the world confessed,
thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Verse 3: O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle; they in glory shine.
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Please join me in a Time of Remembering:

Totenfest is a tradition that comes out of the Evangelical heritage of the United Church of Christ. It was established in 1816, by the Prussian Emperor Fredrick William III, as a day to remember the soldiers who had recently died in the Prussian War.

It became an important observance in the Evangelical Church as a day to remember not only those who died in the war, but also, friends and family who had passed away the previous year. Since it was the time of clearing gardens and fields of summer growth in preparation for winter, *Totenfest*, in parts of Germany, is the day families visit the graves of loved ones to clean off the summer flowers and cover graves with evergreen boughs for the winter.

We celebrate Totenfest today, as it was first observed, on the last Sunday of the Church year and we will light individual candles to remember all those who have passed into eternal life during this past year.

We pause now to remember the lives of sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, siblings and grandparents, aunts and uncles, spouses and partners and friends... As I mention the names you have given me, I will light a candle and the church bells will toll.

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|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Rev. Don King | Leona Brink | Pat Schultz | Lavern Richert |
| Rev. Bart Bartholomew | Leonard Loertcher | Carol Arnett | George Amelse |
| Alice Duginske | Walter Nelson (Linda’s Uncle) | Dave, Scott’s brother | |
| Wayne Brunner | Rev, Kathy Rust | Pastor Keane Foster | |
| Pastor Scott Crandall | Rev Mark Showalter | Pat Hommerding | |

Those who have died in the service of our country.

The 250,000 beloved COVID virus victims.

If there are others, please mention them now...for all those mentioned.

Let us pray: Let us pray: Holy God, you meet us here this day as we remember and continue to celebrate the lives of those who have passed into your eternal care. You catch our tears of sadness and feel our pain of loss. Help us to hold on in hope to the assurance that eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor human imagination envisioned what you have prepared for us all. As we feel the sting of death and loss and we cling to you, Jesus, our Way, our Truth and our Life, for the gift of peace and comfort that you have promised.

We give thanks that we are not alone when we are sad and afraid and neither are we alone when we are deliriously happy. We give thanks, Gracious God, that you are near us today as we share this time of remembrance, joining with the great cloud of witnesses that surrounds us.

We lift our prayers in your name, Creator, Redeemer and Comforter. Amen

1 Corinthians 12:4-20 New International Version

⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues,^[a] and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Unity and Diversity in the Body

¹²Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

Please pray with me: Gracious one of many names, speak to us in the words that we hear, through the people you have set on our path today, and by those who in years past, have paved the way for us to be here. We give you thanks that we are able to join in this virtual and papered space. We pray in your name, O Holy One, who has made us; O Christ, who calls us to follow him; and O Spirit, who makes all things new. Amen.

My message today is entitled, “Let’s Say Together: Thanks be to God”

When you hear me say these words, “Let’s say together” please join me in saying **“Thanks be to God!”**

Try it now: Let’s say together: Thanks be to God. (perfect)

We have come together in anticipation of celebrating the 231st Thanksgiving Day.

Let’s say together: Thanks be to God.

We have set aside this time to remember those who have passed from this life into the eternal and we have set aside this day, as one in many, to hold their memory fondly in our hearts. We are here on this last Sunday of the Season of Pentecost, this last Sunday of the Church Year and on this beginning of a week which observes a time designated by our government, to purposefully remember to give thanks.

There are, you know, other times of thanksgiving, when we, either alone or collectively... give thanks.

Paul wrote from prison to the Ephesians, “Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God, the Father, for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:19-20, NIV)...and he

wrote to the Thessalonians: (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NRSV) “¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

Giving thanks over and over again, even in times of hardship and sickness; even in times of loss and disaster, as you well know, feels impossible. Diana Butler Bass, in her book, “Grateful,” has quoted researcher, Robert Emmons, in saying “Gratitude drives out our toxic emotions of resentment, anger and envy...” and she writes how gratitude helps to keep us healthier. Let us say together: thanks be to God.

I may be wrong, but I am not so sure that Jesus ever exactly TOLD his disciples to be thankful. He did give them plenty of reasons to BE thankful...and scriptures indicate that he gave thanks, over and over again and thanked people thanked HIM.

When... he took the seven loaves and the fish, he thanked God for them, and broke them into pieces...and then, he gave them to the disciples, who distributed the food to the crowd. **Matthew 15:36**

When... he healed the 10 lepers, ¹⁵ One of them, ... came back, praising God in a loud voice... threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him...**Luke 17:11-16 (NIV)**

For all the times that we have *had reason* to be thankful and for the times that it has slipped our minds to *return* and give thanks, let us say together: Thanks be to God.

Billy Graham once wrote this: “Thanksgiving—the giving of thanks—to God for all His blessings should be one of the most distinctive marks of the believer in Jesus Christ.”

Yes. I am thinking that if we, as Christians, are truly thankful, even in the midst of political divisions, even if the COVID virus has us living in fear, even if the pumpkin pie somehow didn’t turn out, even if our relatives and friends have announced that they are staying home, even if the only deer you have seen was running across the highway last week ...even when...(you fill in the blank)...we will find that we will be able to savor at least a little bit of thankfulness every day. We, like every Pilgrim who wandered onto the wilderness of this continent so many years ago, have many reasons to be thankful. Think of one. Let us say together: Thanks be to God.

What, you are hesitant to even *thank* God today? We are not the first ones who ever doubted that God cares. The Israelites, wandering in the desert to the “promised land,” could find thing after another to grumble about and couldn’t think of one thing to be thankful for! In the book of Exodus, we find these blaming words: “You’ve brought us out into this wilderness to starve us to death and let us die of thirst...?” (Exodus 16:3 MSG) We’ve been there, haven’t we? “Dear God, how us sunny skies not hurricanes,” we say. “Where are you in the forest fires?” “Save the children.” “Break down the walls of our bitterness and mistrust, oh God.” “We’ll make you a deal... but first, get rid of this virus.”

We cry and complain...and can’t see back over our shoulders at the path, however broken, that got us here today. We have come through many dangers, toils and snares already. Let’s commit to renewing our trust in God and let’s say together: Thanks be to God!

Take a deep breath...and let it out. Close your eyes and answer these questions. What have you seen lately that is just gorgeous? (sunsets and sunrises) What has caused you to laugh? (a funny commercial, animals playing, children learning to speak) What takes your breath away? (an unexpected phone call, a squirrel looking in your patio door, an eagle swooping closely over the road in front of you, the announcement of a possible vaccine) What is unbelievable? (parents and birth children being reunited by DNA, people working in the Space Station) What do you love to taste? (chocolate, hamburger on the grill) What smells do you savor? (Turkey baking, Coffee brewing) What sounds delight you? (The voices of children, music, the doorbell)

Again, let’s say together: Thanks be to God.

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, we are reminded of the gifts that each one of us has been given...of the diversity of our talents and callings; ideas, heritages and religious affiliations; our hopes and dreams; the possibilities that surround us. These words are so appropriate right here and right now “...and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...” Let’s say together: Thanks be to God.

I pray that our gatherings, if any, this week will be graced with open minds and grateful hearts. As Thursday

has been set aside to give thanks...let us set our minds on continuing to do what we can to work together as a church using our individual gifts to care for one another, for the stranger in our midst and for ourselves.

We trust that our heavenly Father knows exactly what we need and also entrusts us with the care of one another. God is enabling us to make a difference in our community in as many ways as you and I can think of and in these simple, yet far-reaching ways:

making sure that our "Blessing Box" is always filled;
remembering to share our spare coats in the "coats for kids" boxes around town;
staying at home if we are sick;
wearing face coverings and keeping a safe distance from one another.

I am reminding you to make it possible that others, too, will find reasons to give thanks and that you will know "thanks" in the "giving." As Pastor, it is my privilege to provoke you to do good deeds...not to just to provoke you! We are in this together ...because we are all one in Jesus. Let's say together: Thanks be to God..

Let's spend a few moments in silent prayer. Take a deep breath. And breath it out.

Let us pray together:

Oh, great God, we come with eyes eager to see you, ears straining to hear you and hearts longing to meet with you. We have come with minds open to learn of you and with hands and feet ready to respond to your leading. We see many needs around us and sometimes do not know where to begin. It is then that we recall that you are the Great Provider and Sustainer. Show us ways that we can more successfully be your hands and feet...wherever we are. By the power of your Spirit, use us to meet the needs of others, even in the midst of our own neediness.

Hear our prayers for Brian N, Mike K, Jessica, Mike G-P, Barry, Jane, Matt, Ron J, Lorraine Schmidt and Denny's sister. Bring healing to those who are receiving chemotherapy and other treatments for cancer, for those recovering from and waiting for surgery; those who face medical testing; those who silently suffer with mental health problems. We place our trust in you, Great Healer.

Merciful God, we bring our joys and concerns to you, knowing that you hear every prayer. Grant us wisdom and courage for the living of these days. We boldly pray in the name of Jesus:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but, deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen

This is our time of intention and thanks: Let us pray: Ever giving God, we ask that, as we have received, we now give; as we have prospered, we now share. We dedicate our offerings of time and talents, as well as our treasures to further the work of your Church and to give You glory. Amen.

Benediction: Go now with thankful hearts. As our worship ends, may our service begin again and again, as we count our blessings and give thanks this week. Go in peace.

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