

## ***The Saints We've Known***

The Morning Message for Sunday Morning Worship with Communion

All Saints Sunday

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT

November 1, 2015

Text: Psalm 146

All Saints Day, which this year falls on a Sunday, is actually the second day of a three day or triduum of sacred days in the Christian year. A day of solemnity in the Roman Catholic tradition which has in recent years gained broader recognition in the Protestant tradition, especially in the mainline churches, All Saints Day was first celebrated by the faithful in the 5<sup>th</sup> century when it was the custom to go and visit the places of martyrdom for local saints. As time passed, All Saints Day became the day set aside to recognize all saints known and unknown. It is preceded by All Hallow's Eve or Halloween, the day before which was originally a day of preparation for All Saints Day. It evolved into the celebration of ghosts and ghouls we know it as today when it became intertwined in the 8<sup>th</sup> century with Samhain, a Celtic festival of the dead. All Souls Day is celebrated on November 2 and this is the day on which those near and dear to us who have died are to be especially remembered. In the Protestant tradition, thanks especially to our brothers and sisters in the Methodist tradition, All Saints Day and All Souls Day have become conflated

or inter-twined since the Methodists came to think of all the faithful departed as saints, or at least having that potential.

So as we mark the occasion of All Saints Day today, we are following along the pathway of a tradition which has evolved over the centuries and one which, I believe, has much value for us in our overwrought and anxiety ridden 21<sup>st</sup> century lives. As we pause to remember the folks dear to us who have died, we are taking time to think not only about those special people. We are also making the effort to set aside our own worries and concerns to recall quite intentionally how God has blessed us through special people who have made us who we are. These folks who have left their imprint, their very fingerprints, on our beings become part of us once again as we remember and give thanks for them on All Saints Day. As we do, we are opening ourselves to being touched by them once more. We are also testifying to our faith that this life is not all there is. By recalling our loved ones who have died we are also reminding ourselves of Jesus' promise that they are with him in heaven, as he promised they would be. They are not alone in the cold darkness of eternity. They are bathed in the eternal sunlight of God's presence, something our text for this morning makes us clear.

So our plan for this morning is NOT a sermon from me. Instead, this will be a time for you to offer your thoughts and memories, your thanksgiving for the lives of special people who

have touched you and who are much on your mind and in your heart this morning. In particular, we want to share a few memories of Ann Brown, a long-time member who died last weekend. I didn't know Ann well, but somehow I think she would be pleased that this opportunity to celebrate her life falls within the context of Sunday morning worship instead of at a more traditional memorial service. I've heard a lot of Ann stories since I've been here and it's clear to me that she loved this church with all of who she was. I've heard stories about her brooming the upper parking lot on a 90 degree day just because it needed to be done. I've heard about her strong opinions on how Deacons should be dressed when they are serving Communion. Ann made a huge difference in the life of this church, so as we begin these All Saints Day recollections of our own saints, are there one or two folks willing to share a brief story about Ann? [pause for a few]

And now I would also like us to have the opportunity to remember other saints who have touched our lives whom we would like to honor *briefly* this day. To do this, I am going to ask you to stand where you are and I will bring the microphone to you. Remember, one or two sentences are what we're hoping for! [pause for speakers]

Thank you, God, for the tangible saints of our lives. Hold them close in your tender embrace which extends through and beyond time. Amen.