

Just Because

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT

November 2, 2025 – Morning worship

Text: Luke 8:1-3

Franciscan priest, Biblical scholar and public theologian Richard Rohr suggests in his latest book *The Tears of Things* that each of us receives an invitation from God in moments of profound sadness and grief. That invitation is to use the resources of our faith to tell ourselves one simple truth in those moments: “I am not the first nor the last to feel this dying. I can now choose to be a weak but willing member of the whole communion of saints.”¹ I wanted us to reflect on this whole notion of finding solace from loss and hope for the future from our participation in the beloved community we know as our church. This special All Saints worship service offers us a unique opportunity to do something we do not ordinarily do in everyday life. On this Sunday, we intentionally bring ourselves back into a time of profound grief and loss *on purpose* in order to honor these loved ones we are remembering this day. We are deciding in this moment two things. First, that we are now strong enough to revisit this grief which we all know never really leaves us. Rather, we learn to live with it, to compartmentalize it, so we can still live our lives as we know our loved ones would want us to. Second, we are remembering them – these people beloved of us whom we have entrusted back to God’s eternal care. Remembering a time of such extreme pain is an act of courage in and of itself. To do so within the context of a faith community like we are doing today is an act of faith. Dear ones, this is what makes the church, the

¹ Richard Rohr, *The Tears of Things: Prophetic Wisdom in an Age of Outrage*, ©2025 Center for Action and Contemplation, p. 104.

church. To be that community that holds us together when we feel like we have been broken beyond repair.

That brokenness can come from grief and loss of someone beloved of ours, yes. It can also be a result of a life not lived well because of all sorts of poor choices so easy to make in this world where bad options seem to outnumber the good ones far too often. That brokenness can result from chronic poor health or economic inequality from which there is no escape. Dear ones, the truth is that far too many of us walk around each day broken and hurting. This All Saints Day in the church is about remembering, naming, honoring all these people, all these moments of loss and sadness in our lives. We do this, quite intentionally, to face our common loss together in this, God's house, surrounded by God's beloved community in this place. We do this to remind ourselves that even in the moments of the deepest sadness we are never alone, even though it feels that way far too often. We need this reminder, dear ones, because whether we realize it or not, we carry these losses and the trauma they cause us in our bodies and our souls every day of our lives. We do this ritualized act of remembrance because we need this reminder, perhaps more as time goes on and the loss becomes more distant in time and space. We do this because these people we have loved and lost have made us who we are and we want to acknowledge that here in this place, among these people this morning. We do this just because we can and because we should.

This is why Susanna's story is my choice for our reflection this morning. In our text today, Luke lists her among the women who supported the ministry of Jesus and the disciples "out of their resources." (Luke 8:3) In truth, Susanna along with other women, including Mrs. Chuza, Joanna and Mary Magdalene herself, were the ones bankrolling Jesus. But they were so much more than that

in the early days of what became Christianity. What is extraordinary about the inclusion of these women by name in this particular passage is that they are listed as being part of the entire group of people traveling with Jesus at this point in his ministry. Luke is very clear that this community of believers which had formed around Jesus included the Twelve and also some women who were now recognized as part of this inner circle. This in itself is miraculous given the cultural reality that at this point in history and in this society, women did not socialize in any way with men to whom they were not related. This co-mingling of the sexes in Jesus' company of followers was just never seen. It wasn't done. It didn't happen. And yet here they were, traveling with Jesus as they made his work possible with their financial support and I am sure practical and moral support as well. Noteworthy here also is that these women are further described as "women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities." (Luke 8:2) So these women were, in fact, people who had experienced both the miraculous healing power of Jesus but also had been with him as he taught and prayed. They were in the thick of it all. And Susanna was one of them. This ordinary woman about whom we know nothing beyond her name and her generosity to Jesus and the Twelve played a pivotal role in the earliest days of the Jesus Movement. She and these other women made the whole thing possible. This is why Susanna and Mrs. Chuza, and Joanna and Mary the Magdalene must be among all those generations of people whom we recall in our minds and hearts on this All Saints Sunday. She, dear friends, was one of us and is still.

As we consider all these beloved people whose memories we are recalling this morning through photos and names lifted up, we are remembering all those Susanna's, all those Sally's, all those Becky's, all those Linda's and Judy's, all those June's and Bob's,

all those Asael's and Connie's who made our church what it is today – a true beacon of hope in our community. Today, we are remembering and giving thanks and praise to God for their presence in our lives. For the inspiration they gave us to do more, to be more, than we thought we could. For their determination to move forward through painful and challenging circumstances. For their smiles that could light up a room. For the mentoring, the teaching, the coaching, the encouragement at our worst moments. The people who are there for us just because they wanted to be – these are the true saints of All Saints Day, our very own saints within our church.

We have been blessed by so very many of them right here in our church. It is no exaggeration to say theirs are the shoulders upon which we stand; theirs is the legacy upon which we are building; theirs are the hopes and the dreams for this church that we are striving to carry forward into the future. All the saints of this church surround us every time we are gathered here in prayer, every time we sing a hymn or the doxology or the peace blessing at the end of the service. They are here as we gather for Bible story or Books conversations, for board meetings or clean-up days. They are here as we prepare for the Bazaar and every other church event. They were here when the church needed them and they now call us to do the same. Just because ... because we can. Because we care. Because God needs us to. Because Jesus asks us to. Because the Holy Spirit provides the energy to tackle whatever needs to be done here. Just because.

We are a part of the company of saints in this place and we always will be, even if we move away, even if our health is such that we can't be here as we once could or help as we once did. We are part of this company of saints here in this church, and also in that company of saints which trace their lineage all the way back

through history – over time and generations – to Susanna and these other women and men, to the disciples, even to Mary and Joseph and those shepherds who heard the good news of Jesus' birth from angels in the dark of night. We are part of this beloved community right here and right now that we know as the United Congregational Church of Westerly, United Church of Christ. We recognize and respond to God's call daring to follow God's lead even when it doesn't always make sense to do so. Along with Susanna and so many others too numerous to count we dare to answer God's call, trusting that we are able to change the world through our support of Jesus when his simple message of loving others and loving God is becoming so misconstrued by too many.

Dear ones, on this All Saints Sunday, I invite you, I urge you, to have the courage to face your sadness for your loved ones now gone into God's nearer presence. Remember not the pain of their loss but instead the warmth of their smile, the joys of time spent together, the memories of them still filling all the corners of your soul. Celebrate their memory this day, knowing that wherever they are this day, they still love you. They miss you too. Your memories of them are still their memories in ways we can neither know nor understand. Most of all, know and trust that they are safe in God's care for all eternity. A blessed All Saints Sunday to you, and to them. Amen.