

**First United Methodist Church
618 Eighth Street
Columbus, IN 47201**

**Rev. Howard E. Boles
November 4, 2018**

“The Communion of Saints”
Revelation 21:1-6a

Let us begin with a word of prayer to gather our hearts and minds: **Loving god, we wear the title reluctantly, like a garland that must surely belong to someone more suited than ourselves, but you have called us your people, the holy saints of this place. In this time, help us as we honor those saints, living and dead, and dedicate our lives anew to your service. Amen.**

James Corden is the host of the Late Late Show which airs on the local CBS station. If you haven't seen the show, that is not surprising since it comes on at 12:30 a.m. One of the recurring segments that Corden does is called “Carpool Karaoke” where he picks up a famous singer, pretending that it was a random encounter, and then they sing while Corden drives. Among the celebrities he has featured are Stevie Wonder, Taylor Swift, Bruno Mars and most recently Barbra Streisand. The segment is entertaining and filled with laughter and sing along moments.

This summer Corden did a segment with Sir Paul McCartney. Along with singing in the car, they drove around Liverpool visiting some of the sites where he grew up and which were featured in his music. The whole piece is 23 minutes long and I hope that you will look for it later this week for the full enjoyment. I want to share one small part this morning.

[Play video clip of Carpool Karaoke with Paul McCartney singing “Let It Be.]

Two simple words. “He is.” I suspect that James’ grandfather was smiling down at that moment. I have watched this video several times and I tear up each time. The people we love continue to be with us. They are here among us now.

In some cultures, All Saints Day is celebrated with picnics in the cemetery. You will find extended families with blankets laid out and an array of wonderful food spread among them. By holding this picnic in the cemetery, they are remembering that their loved ones, though not with them physically, continue to be with them spiritually.

This is a central Christian doctrine that we call the communion of the saints. It is a part of the Apostle’s Creed where we remind ourselves that we believe in the communion of the saints. But what does this mean?

The communion of the saints recognizes that even though death is a natural part of life, it doesn’t end that relationship. Our loved ones remain among us, not in a creepy haunting way, but in a loving and supportive way. We carry their words of wisdom in our hearts. We cherish their

loving support and encouragement with us into new endeavors. We remember their courage and insight during difficult moments and we find inspiration.

In her book, "Braving the Wilderness," begins by writing about her fears. Before even beginning to write, she experiences those self doubts that can be paralyzing. She wonders whether she is really the best person to write these things, whether she has done enough research and how people will respond to what she is writing. Any preacher with a sense of self-reflection can relate to those feelings.

But then she finds a quiet place and looks for the inspiration from others whose courage is contagious. She says, "I read and watch everything by them or about them that I can get my hands on---every interview, every essay, every lecture, every book. I do this so that when I need them, they come to sit with me and cheer me on."

The communion of the saints. They come to encourage us. They inspire us. They are the people we look to for their quiet strength, the folks we remember today. And they shared many gifts that continue to inspire us today.

Larry Clark loved to play table tennis and was among the best to be found. But on a more important level, he was a man of deep faith, serving here at First UMC and as a lay pastor at several churches throughout the area.

Don Prince was a creature of habit who awoke every day at 6:09 a.m. because he claimed that he didn't know how to change his clock. But he followed that with the wonderful ritual of banging pots and pans in the kitchen as he made breakfast for his family.

Mary June Gurthet loved adventures, whether traveling around the world or inner tubing on the lake in her 70's. But one of the treasured family memories was that every Sunday night she made dinner and everyone gathered around to reflect upon their week.

Ed Mann embodied dependability, choosing the same lunch every day...a baloney sandwich with mustard and mayonnaise. But while we shared a good laugh at this remembrance, that dependability was manifest in his always being there for his family...at his children's and grandchildren's events as a source of encouragement.

Susan Douglas was inquisitive, intelligent and had a wonderful laugh. She was a deeply caring woman quietly supporting the ministries of this church and reaching out to those who were in need around the world. She had a particular soft spot for the United Methodist Committee on Relief and always wanted to know how they were responding and how she could support them.

Jan Sell, a beloved member of our choir and a lover of music, is remembered for a deep and abiding faith. She carried a positive attitude into all her endeavors and was an inspiration in her battles with cancer. In all that she did, she exuded confidence that assured you that it would all work out.

Mac Randall was a teacher and lifelong learner. When I wanted to know anything about the history of this church, it took just one phone call and Mac would have several stories, a couple of newspaper articles and his own research to offer. At Mac's funeral I recalled an African adage that says "when an elder dies it is as if a library burned down." Mac embodied that wisdom.

Edna Appel was hospitality personified. Along with greeting folks to our community, she would take the opportunity to invite them to First UMC. There are several folks here today because of Edna's invitations. She was active in the knitting group and many have been comforted by her kindness.

Dean Smith's life and vocation were connected to making the world a better place. Here and in Indianapolis his work led to safe, healthy communities. And in his private life, he cared for creation through planting trees and flowers and filling the world with beauty.

And Ralph Schumann was another of those dedicated choir members who shared his talents every Sunday morning. He and his wife Nancy helped create the Schumann piano fund which will enable great music to continue to flourish here.

I apologize that I only have the time to offer a brief snapshot of these wonderful folks that we remember today. They inspired us. They shared their gifts with us. They made us the richer for having been here among us. And their legacy continues in the lives of all those they touched. For their lives we say thanks.

The communion of saints says that they live on through each of us. They and countless other saints that we each remember are here with us today.

In that brief reading from the book of Revelation, it begins with an unusual phrase. The author writes that he saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former things have passed away and something new has come. He writes that the sea is no more.

Those simple words are profoundly important. If we were to go back into the book of Revelation, the sea is a way of describing the things that separate us from God. But when the author says that the sea has passed away, there is nothing between us and God. God is right here among us. Those impediments have been removed. That is what enables that other promise to be realized. God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Our grief and sorrow will be lifted.

All Saints Sunday is filled with mixed emotions. On one hand we are sad by the death of those we have named here today. They were our spouses, our parents, our grandparents, our relatives, our friends, our neighbors. They sat with us in the pew and there is an empty place where they once were. That grief and sorrow is normal and to be expected. And that is why it is important to remember them, to name them, to celebrate them.

But today we also give thanks. We give thanks for the communion of saints who are here with us, who have shaped our lives, our church and our community. There will be those moments where a tear descends upon your cheek and you think to yourself, "I wish they were here to see

this.” In those times, remember, they are here among us smiling upon the continued goodness that we share.