

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

November 3, 2024, All Saint's Sunday, The 24th Sunday After Pentecost, The 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 25: 6-9, John 11: 32-44, Revelation 21: 1-6a

THE GREAT FEAST

CONNECTED IN JOY

This morning I'm going to ask you to use your memory and your imagination. If you find it helpful you may want to close your eyes as you imagine and remember. Now see yourself at one of your favorite meals you've had with family or friends, or both. It may have been in the last weeks, or it may be a time from the past, it may be decades ago, or at the last big holiday you celebrated together. You may have been a child at the table, or a teenager or adult. As we enter November, you may already be making Thanksgiving meal plans. You may be remembering a wonderful Thanksgiving or other holiday meal from long ago, or just a regular Friday dinner or Tuesday lunch, when the table was full of friends or family, and it is still a sweet memory you cherish.

Think of one of those meals where there was laughter and stories and remembrances.

One of those meals where it almost didn't matter what was on the table because the joy of being together and the good conversations were so good,

but you can also remember the great meal you shared.

Let yourself feel what it was like to look into those faces of cherished loved ones.

Let yourself feel what it was like to look up and down the table and see joy on those faces.

Let yourself feel all the emotions of that meal in this moment of silence.

CONNECTED TO THE SAINTS WHO'VE GONE BEFORE US

Now, in keeping with this All Saints' Sunday, when we remember the saints who have gone before us into Heaven, I want you to imagine another table.

There are as many chairs around that table as you need.

Take a moment to fill up that table with your friends and family who are no longer with you on earth. Imagine getting to have one more meal with them. Fill up those chairs with the people you miss because they have gone before you into Heaven. Imagine a table and the seats are filled with your spouse or partner, your parents, grandparents, children, aunts, uncles and cousins, adopted family and cherished friends who have gone before you into Heaven. Imagine getting to have one more meal with them, one more conversation, one more hug, one more laugh or one more cry. Fill up that table with the ones your heart is missing on this day and give yourself a moment to let yourself imagine sitting at that table. *Let yourself feel that love and community* in this moment of silence .

CONNECTED TO THE LAST SUPPER

Now I invite you to go back 2,000 years and imagine yourself in an upper room in Jerusalem, built of stone. It is rustic and simple. The windows have no screens, just the stone ledges, and you can hear the noises of people passing in the street below. You can feel the breeze coming in the window. There is a low table and you all recline on pillows and blankets around the table. It is a somber meal because Jesus has told you over and over again that he must die for his people, and on the third day rise again, and the time for that is drawing near.

Let yourself sit among Jesus' disciples, the men and women who followed him, in their simple robes and sandaled feet. Look up and down the table at their faces. Let yourself imagine that you are looking into Jesus' face.

See the jugs of simple country wine and shaped pottery cups. You see the simple Middle Eastern bread, flat loaves cooked over the heat of a domed stone oven. Let yourself see the fingerprints of the baker where they pushed the flattened loaf onto the wall of the stone.

Let yourself sit at the table with Jesus and the men and women who followed him as he picks up the bread from a plate on the table. He shows it to each person up and down the table, and then he prays over the bread and breaks it and passes a piece to everyone, including you. Let yourself look into his eyes as he passes you the bread. You hear him say: "This bread is my body, broken for you, whenever you eat it, do this in remembrance of me." Then he holds up one of the cups and says: "And this cup is the cup of a new covenant, sealed in my blood for the forgiveness of sins. As often as you drink it, do this in remembrance of me, for as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup you proclaim my death until I come again in glory."

Let yourself feel the pottery cup in your hand, feel it's coolness against your lips as you taste the bitter wine. Feel the touch of the next person you pass the cup to them.

Let yourself feel the gift of this meal in this moment of silence .

CONNECTED TO PREPARATIONS FOR THE FINAL BANQUET TABLE

And now imagine the final table, the final banquet table the Bible promises we will each sit at one day, the great and final feast at the banqueting table of the Lord. A table filled with joyous conversation and shared love, a table filled with our loved ones, and all through human history who have gone before us, a table filled with the love of Jesus broken and poured out for us all.

And the words of Isaiah and the visions of John of Patmos recorded in Revelations reach out and invite us to join Lazarus and Mary and Martha, and Abraham and Sarah and Hagar, and Moses and Miriam and Aaron, and Priscilla and Aquila, and Lydia and Paul and all the women and men whose stories we have been blessed with in the Old and New Testaments. Let yourself see all our loved ones, family and friends and adopted family who have gone before you, and those who fill your lives now

Isaiah and Revelations give us this promised vision saying:

"The Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
And God will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of the people God will take away from all the earth." (Isaiah 25)

"See the promise that is for us, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with us; we will be God's peoples, and God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

And the one who is seated with us says, "See, I am making all things new." (Revelation 21)

And we will respond with Isaiah who also sits at this table: "See, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that God might save us.

This is the Lord for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isaiah 25)

Let yourself start looking up and down that promised banqueting table, let yourself feel what it is like to have all the tears wiped from your eyes, and the eyes of those whose tears broke your heart. Let yourself hear the rumble of joyous conversation as each person there is released from the

mourning and crying and pain that was a part of their lives.

Let yourself look into the faces of our mothers and fathers of faith from the Bible and from the Christian Church through the ages,

see your heroes of life and faith and imagine getting to have a conversation with them.

Let yourself see everyone you love filling all the chairs around you,

See the rich diversity of the nations filling the table; you now get to live in the presence of God's inclusive love for all of God's children.

Let yourself feel the reunion of being together, gathered into the presence of Jesus who has saved us all and brought us Home to ourselves and our God.

Feel the amazing truth that you have an eternity to celebrate and worship God in this place. That truly now there is nothing that can separate you from being face to face with the Love of our God for all time.

Let yourself feel the reality of God's promise of eternal life gathered together at this great feast, in this moment of silence.

CONNECTED TO THE PRESENT LIFE OF OUR COMMUNION MEAL

And now, you don't need to use our imagination for the final table because our Communion Table is here in this sanctuary, front and center, with us week by week.

At least once a month we gather at this Communion Table.

We share in the bread of heaven, Jesus' body broken for us; and the cup of salvation, Jesus' blood shed for us.

Week by week we see this table.

Month by month we share our family meal here.

When we come to this table it is more joyful than our most favorite meal we remembered because the Living Christ meets us here with all the saints we worship with, and the saints who have gone before us into Heaven and the saints of God all around the globe.

This table reminds us of the deep joy of the love of Christ who connects us.

This table reminds us that Jesus' love connects us to our family and friends who have gone before us into Heaven.

When we gather for communion, we are with them once again.

This table reminds us of the table in the Upper Room where Jesus gathered with those he loved for a last supper. It was then that his followers through the ages were given a new meal and a new covenant by our Savior Jesus.

He continues to hand us the bread and the cup in love at this table every time we share the Lord's Supper.

And this table reminds us of the promised heavenly banquet, where Matthew and Luke's gospels (Matthew 11:13:29) tell us that people "will come from east and west, from north and south, to sit at the banquet in the Kingdom of God."

And in the words of Isaiah and Revelations we will be fed a rich feast of a meal, and every tear will be wiped away and mourning, and crying and pain will be no more and God will make all things new.

Every time we come to this Communion Table, as we will today, we can look forward to that Heavenly Banquet where our chair is waiting for us.

Beloved children of God, Jesus has given us the gift of our Family Meal, the Lord's Supper. He has given us new life in his death and resurrection, and he invites us to come together today with the saints we worship with here and at home, Christians around the globe, and the beloved saints who have gone before us into Heaven. The heavenly banquet awaits us; until that time, we have this banqueting table here in our Sanctuary so that we can come to the table of the Lord, until that day we come to the table in Heaven. This is our Good News, we are invited to come to the table of life and joy and family and constant love, given to us by our Savior Jesus, now and for all eternity. Alleluia! Amen.

Go to Communion Table for the Reading of the names