

Isaiah 25:6-9

25:6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

25:7 And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever.

25:8 Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

25:9 It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Let us pray-

Eternal God-

Reveal yourself to us in your words, in our community, in the gathering around your table. Open us to your presence. Amen.

Sermon All Saints' Day  
Kawolics

Pastor Susi

On the coasts of Scotland and Ireland there are certain sites that the locals call "thin places." They are called "thin" because it is believed that in these places the distance between heaven and earth shrinks, and the veil between the two worlds is so "thin" you can actually perceive something of heaven itself. In fact, there is an old Celtic saying that heaven and earth are only three feet apart, but in the thin places that distance is even smaller! Some of us may have had these experiences – where we just know there is more out there than meets our senses – where somehow we catch just a glimpse – however fleeting – of a time and space beyond our world.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims that God will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations. I believe there are times when the shroud is so thin, the veil so transparent, that we actually catch glimpses of heaven.

Today we celebrate All Saints Day when we remember those who have gone to heaven. In the early Church, Christians would commemorate the anniversary of a martyr's death by celebrating the Eucharist over their tomb or the place where they died. At some point, the number of people that died because of their faith became so great that a separate day couldn't be assigned to each one of them, and so the Church appointed a common day for all of them. A few

hundred years later, All Saints day was expanded to include all the saints, whether martyrs or not, and whether known or not.

This is the day we remember those loved ones who have physically left our world. Our faith allows us to celebrate because we believe that Jesus has conquered death, so death is not the end. The eternal God, the eternal Christ has transcended time and space. Those gone from this earth, those saints, may no longer be with us bodily, but they are just beyond the horizon. They are with Christ, gathered around a feast of rich foods described in our reading.

With the remembrance of our loved ones who have passed away also comes sadness. We grieve the loss of their life, the loss of their presence here with us. When Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, he showed us that weeping does not mean that we don't believe in eternal life. Rather, it is part of the healing of our broken hearts. Although the sorrow will never completely go away, we pray it may be eased into a sorrow that we can bear. And part of what helps make it bearable is that we put our hope in the resurrection. We are comforted knowing our loved ones are held in God's embrace. And we ourselves are as well. We believe that God is close, caring and compassionate, and that, while not taking away the sorrow, God is right beside us, wiping away the tears. God is with us through all the phases of our grief, through our anger, our denial, our sadness.

Those whom we miss brought a special light into our lives. They give us a glimpse of God's light. Saints are those who let this light shine through their lives. Just as God was made flesh in the real person of Jesus, saints make real for us the light of Christ. They make it real when they show love, forgiveness, compassion, gentleness. It is made tangible when they proclaim God's vision for the world and work for justice and peace.

Today we are especially aware of these lives, those who have personally touched us: those family member and friends. But we also celebrate those we may not personally know, those who have shaped this church community, as well as the UCC, and the whole Christian church. All these many people, what the author of Hebrews calls "the cloud of witnesses", are remembered in our worship today. We acknowledge that we would not be the people, or the community, that we are today without those from the past who have shaped us.

It is important for us to remember these lives, the stories of the ones gone before us. In recalling their stories, we get a sense of connection with our past. We see where God has worked in their lives, and take courage in that remembering, confident that God is working in our own lives as well.

I have been learning a bit about the history of Bainbridge Community UCC and beginning to appreciate the hard work and

dedication, and the vision of those gone before. This church would not be what it is today without those early members. The stories of your beginnings are told in your Centennial booklet. What a wonderful tribute to the founders of this church. Many people mentioned are no longer with us, but their stories are in the bricks and mortar of this building, their spirit is still in this space. They are not forgotten.

Those stories are preserved in a book. But another way to hear and pass these stories on is to tell them orally. In our families, in our churches, in our communities, these stories are mostly told around the table. In our homes, we often tell old stories when we are gathered around the dinner table, or at holidays celebrated with extended family. At Bainbridge Community Church, you have a long history of feeding people, of getting the members together around food. I have not been here that long, but have already seen evidence of this. Those few times I have gathered to eat with you, I've heard some of your own personal stories, as well as those of members of the community. Your coffee hour after church is a great place to gather and talk. I encourage you, especially today, if the memories are not too raw and painful, to tell each other the stories of those whose pictures you brought in. You may want to talk about a favorite memory, or what made that person so special in your life.

When we celebrate our heritage as members of a family, of a church community, of our Christian faith, we recognize our indebtedness to those without whose faithfulness and life modeling we would never have inherited our faith. When we remember them – that is exactly what we do – re-member – acknowledge that they are members of our community, a community which transcends time and place.

I have alluded to your Centennial Book – which covers the years 1868 through 1968. These years were shaped by many who have passed away, the saints of this church. But what will the next Centennial book – the one covering 1968 through 2068 say about this church, about this community? Whose names will it contain? Those in this congregation are the ones who shape the future of this church are the saints of tomorrow.

The only reason we can even become saints is because of God's presence in us. Saints are not people who are perfect. They are the ones who acknowledge when they fall short, ask for and receive forgiveness, and then let Christ's light come into their lives. We live in a world that craves perfection, and forget that saintliness is less about perfection than it is about transformation. What counts is not the end product, but the journey. Are we willing to walk this life, letting the light of God, which is inside us, shine forth to those around us? It is in doing so that we allow people an opportunity to encounter God.

In order to live saintly lives, we need nourishment for this journey. Often, the place we get spiritual nourishment is from the thin places. Marcus Borg writes "A thin place is anywhere our hearts are opened. They are places where the boundary between the two levels [of reality] becomes very soft, porous, permeable. Thin places are places where the veil momentarily lifts and we behold God, experience the one in whom we live, all around us and within us." (The Heart of Christianity, pp. 155-56).

This Communion table is one such place. It is appropriate that Jesus left us a way of remembering his life, death and resurrection in the celebration of Communion, the coming together around a table. This is where we tell our stories. The Passover was a time of retelling the great things God had done for the people – the way God brought them out of slavery into freedom. The Jewish people remembered their connection back to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, all their ancestors in faith.

At this table where we gather for Communion, the veil between the place of heaven and earth is thin. We remember we are united with those gone before us – those we know, and those in our sacred history. All the saints of the past who have shaped our Christian faith, our UCC faith, our Bainbridge Community church faith, and our personal faith are here with us. In fact, the very founder of our faith, Jesus Christ joins us at this table. The veil between past, present and future is also thin. We remember the past – the night Jesus celebrated with his disciples. We remember those in our past who have gone before, who are now gathered around the Lord's table. We join them in the present – today in our worship. But we also look to the future. We are called to live lives of saints, to let God's light shine through, and someday we will all share at the feast of rich food which is promised by God. As the prophet Isaiah says "this is the Lord for whom we have waited." As we gather around this table, let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.