

The First Community Church of Southborough
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Blessings, Everyone!

Keeping in Touch With Our Church Family

Concerns:

We hold in prayer:

- Bob L'Heureux, who is recovering from a recent hospitalization in Milford Hospital
- Darlene Sanderson, who is recovering from a fall (dislocated shoulder) and recent hospitalization in Faulkner Hospital
- those who are suffering from the devastating fires in California that have consumed over four million acres, the worst fires in California's history, and also from the fires in Colorado
- those who are suffering from the recent tropical storms/hurricanes and attendant flooding in Louisiana & Mississippi
- those who suffer from the stain on their soul that is called racism or white nationalism or white supremacy
- our country. Pray for our country. It stands in need of prayers for healing and wholeness.

Thank you to:

- Jim Holmes – for faithfully ringing the church bell at 11:00 a.m. every Sunday morning to remind our neighbors and the world that we are still here, and for sending us pictures of the church and church grounds so we remember what they look like
- The unknown person (Karin Farmer?) who cleaned up the flower bed by the kitchen door and the other flower beds and made them look so nice
- all those who have been faithful in their yearly pledges to the General Fund
- the new members of our church family who are supporting us financially in ways that are helping us survive this difficult time

Sunday Worship as the Gathered Church

When it seems reasonable to resume our discussion of the possibility of meeting again for worship in person, we will call a meeting of what will essentially function as an expanded Church Council. Present at this meeting will be the Pastor, the Moderator, the Clerk, the Treasurer, the Collector, our Organist/Choir Director, the members of the Diaconate, the members of the Board of Trustees, representatives from other boards and committees, and anyone else who would like to attend. If the Covid-19 restrictions are still in place, we may meet in the sanctuary where we can observe safe social distancing, rather than trying to set up a virtual meeting. The Church Council is empowered to act on behalf of the members of the church between annual meetings.

We also need to begin thinking ahead to our Annual Meeting in February. Each board and committee should begin the process of reviewing its budget, especially with an eye to cutting expenses, so we can submit the revised budget to Bob Farmer, who will pull it all together and present it to us at our Annual Meeting this coming February, which we hope we will be able to hold in person. We should be prepared to go through 2021 as we are right now, having our "meetings" online and communicating through email and phone, but we should also be prepared to resume worship and our church life in person to whatever extent state guidelines, denominational (UCC) guidelines, Yankee common sense, and our own philosophy of moving with an abundance of caution and an abundance of care will permit.

Missions:

Our mission outreach for the month of October is Straight Ahead Ministries. Straight Ahead Ministries reaches out to troubled youth and teens, e.g., in gangs or who are in the Juvenile Justice system, providing them with ways of obtaining a high school education while in detention and with hope for a better future. The core of the organization's mission is to also provide troubled youth/teens with a Christian education, with the possibility of becoming a Christian and building a relationship with Jesus Christ. They have had amazing success in helping youths who were going down a self-destructive path in life turn their life around.

If you feel moved to support Straight Ahead Ministries, you can contact them directly or send a check made out to our church and we will forward it to them as part of our mission offering.

Audio Weekly Worship Service

We are offering a weekly worship service that I record. This service can be accessed through the home page of our church website: www.firstcommunitychurch.com; it is in the audio section of the sermon section. Each service is listed by date. The reflection/homily is the reflection that I send to all of you on our expanded church contact list, a list that is comprised of church members, members of our larger church family, and friends of the church, those who have asked to be put on our mailing list. The reflection is also accessible in printed form on our website in the sermon section.

There is, of course, no substitute for meeting together as the gathered church for Sunday worship in our beautiful sanctuary and then celebrating fellowship in our coffee hour (or hour-and-a-half) semi-luncheon downstairs in the vestry following the service. We will return. We just need to be patient.

Several people who have accessed the recorded worship services for September 27, October 4, and October 11, assure us that it is easy to do. I, however, still struggle with recording the service and sending the voice recording by email to David Crane, so we are a little behind on last week's posting. Many thanks to David who takes what I send him, puts it in the proper form, edits the sound, and posts it on the website!

Quote/Thought of the Day

From the sports page of the Boston Globe: *"Victory celebrations outside Staples Center and at private gatherings following the Los Angeles Lakers' defeat of the Toronto Raptors for the NBA championship on October 11 have contributed to a spike in cases of the coronavirus in Los Angeles County, according to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health."*

There will most likely be an additional wild and crazy Los Angeles celebration and consequent COVID-19 outbreak now that the Los Angeles Dodgers have vanquished the Tampa Bay Rays to win their first MLB championship in 32 years.

Isn't it great to be living in Boston where we don't get carried away in our celebration of championships in basketball, baseball, and probably also in football this year and for the foreseeable future? It just shows how disciplined, how health-conscious and socially responsible we are. Or maybe there is another reason. . .

A Second Quote/Thought of the Day

*If you want the truth,
I'll tell you the truth:
Listen to the secret sound,
the real sound,
which is inside you.*

Kabir

Kabir Das was a 15th century Indian mystic poet whose writings influenced Hinduism's Bhakti movement. He was born in Varanasi, India to a Muslim family, but in his youth became a follower of his teacher, the Hindu bhakti leader Ramananda. He was critical of both Hinduism and Islam, believing that followers of both religions were misguided by the Vedas and the Koran. He especially questioned what he regarded as the meaningless rites of initiation in both religions, e.g., the Sacred Thread and circumcision. During his lifetime, he was threatened by both Hindus and Muslims, though both claimed him as one of their own after he died.

Kabir taught that Truth is with the person who is on the path of righteousness, who considers all creatures as his own self, and who is detached from the affairs of the world. To know the real Truth, according to Kabir, we have to get rid of the "I," the ego. He had a strong influence on Rabindranath Tagore.

Attention-Grabbling Church Signs

"Forgive your enemies—it messes with their heads!"

Taken From (Apparently Unedited) Church Sunday Morning Bulletins

"The Rector will preach his farewell message, after which the choir will sing, 'Break Forth Into Joy!'"

Interesting "Facts"

Kenyan runner Abel Mutai was just a few feet from the finish line, but became confused with the signage and stopped, thinking he had completed the race. A Spanish runner, Ivan Fernandez, was right behind him and, realizing what was happening, started shouting at the Kenyan to continue running. Mutai didn't know Spanish and didn't understand. Realizing what was taking place, Fernandez pushed Mutai to victory.

A journalist asked Ivan, "Why did you do that?" Ivan replied, "My dream is that someday we can have a kind of community life where we push and help each other to win."

The journalist insisted "But why did you let the Kenyan win?"

Ivan replied, "I didn't let him win, he was going to win. The race was his."

The journalist insisted, and again asked, "But you could have won!"

Ivan looked at him and replied, "But what would be the merit of my victory? What would be the honor in that medal?"

What would my Mother think of that?"

The Pastor's Reflection

(This reflection will be posted in a written form and also in an audio form as part of a devotional service on our church website: www.firstcommunitychurch.com)

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 45:5-8
John 14:1-3, 15-21, 25-27

"In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."
(John 14:19-20)

You may be surprised to learn that in the final exam to receive a Diploma in Jungian Psychology, in addition to being examined on his/her casework and his/her thesis, the candidate is examined in the following areas: Jungian psychology, Freudian Psychology, the psychology of the unconscious, psychiatry and psychiatric diagnosis, the interpretation of dreams, the

psychological interpretation of fairy tales and mythology, the psychological interpretation of art, psychology of religion, and cultural anthropology. I daresay this is unlike most mainline doctoral psychology examinations in its exploration of psyche in its various manifestations on both an individual and a collective level.

The part of the examination that puzzles many people, including many psychologists who have been educated and trained in modern “evidence-based” psychology, is the inclusion of cultural anthropology as a relevant area of study. What, for heaven’s sake, does cultural anthropology have to do with a psychology of the unconscious and the problems with which people struggle as they traverse the labyrinthian maze of this earthly life?

The answer is simple. Jung found that the archetypes of the collective unconscious, the inner *a priori* structures that find expression in dreams and other expressions of the unconscious, that guide the individual’s individuation process, the movement toward both wholeness and uniqueness, also find expression in societies; the archetypes shape the unfolding, the evolution of cultures as well as individuals. Jung noted that in the dreams of a modern individual, one can find themes that found expression hundreds, if not thousands of years ago in fairy tales, myths, alchemy, Gnosticism, the symbolism of world religions, and cultural rites. A knowledge of cultural rites and symbols may help us understand the developmental task that the Self is presenting to us as individuals through our dreams, and that is helping us deal with our life situation in a constructive way.

A sensitivity to the psychological and sociological importance of cultural anthropology may also enable us to realize how many of the normal rituals of our culture as well as our religious traditions, whatever they are, have been set aside or altered in significant ways because of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, and how important these rites, these rituals are to our psychological wellbeing as individuals and as a society.

Arnold van Gennep, the French/Belgian anthropologist and ethnographer who lived from 1873 to 1957, is generally credited as being the first anthropologist to use the term “rite of passage.” As a result of the mandate to colonize and civilize (by European standards) the “primitive” or “undeveloped” areas of our globe, the European nations, especially those that had access to a sea port and a navy, conquered and essentially raped the indigenous peoples of the world. I now realize that the colonization of the peoples of the world was one of the great tragedies of human history, though when I was in grade school, I was taught that it was a good thing. Then again, I believed that Columbus was a hero, not someone who was responsible for initiating the genocide of Native Americans. I have discovered that there is a lot of history, or various interpretations of history, that never made it into our history books.

A rite of passage is a ritual that enables a developmental transition of some kind to take place. When the European anthropologists finally got around to studying the inhabitants of the countries they had conquered and “hosed,” they found that these “primitive” peoples had, unconsciously, through millennia, established rituals that brought about or attended various important life transitions. These rites or rituals of passage enabled an individual in that culture to move from one stage to another, from one role to another, from one social status to another. In later years, anthropologists like Victor Turner, Mary Douglas, Lucien Levy-bruhl, and Claude Levi-Strauss, in addition to psychologists like Jung, began to view these rites from a psychological, developmental perspective. They found these rites to be important in the psychological development of individuals and also to the health and stability of the society or the culture within which the individual lives. BTW, an excellent movie that illustrates the importance of rites of passage is the old classic *The Emerald Forest*.

Anthropologists have identified a process, a set of stages, that is characteristic of almost all rites of passage, though these stages are more clearly identifiable in some cultures than others. In our culture, these stages are not as clearly identifiable as they are in more traditional (the current preferred term) cultures, and we suffer as a consequence. Without clear, universal

rites of passage, many people fail to move successfully from one stage to another. They experience what is called a failed rite of passage, with its deleterious effects on both the individual and the society. Let us take one initiatory rite, one developmental passage, the movement from being a child to becoming an adult, to illustrate the various stages of this process. The stages are as follows:

1. The Initial State. The individual/child begins in a fixed social state. The state, in our example, is childhood. The individual is a member of a social group (his/her family/community) and has a role and clearly defined responsibilities or tasks within that group. With a child, these tasks are not as onerous and demanding as they are with adults, though this does not prevent the child/adolescent from complaining and threatening to report his/her parents to the Department of Children and Their Families for child abuse in response to his/her parents' entreaties to empty the dishwasher or take out the trash. But that's not the point.

2. Separation. The individual, in this case the child/adolescent, is separated from the group within which he/she claimed membership. This separation, especially from one's family of origin, is an important part of the developmental process not only for people in traditional/archaic cultures but for us in our modern cultures today. Psychoanalytic theory has traditionally emphasized the importance of separation and individuation, the physical separation from one's parents and the development of one's own thoughts, beliefs, values, etc. as essential to psychological development and healthy functioning as an adult.

3. The Liminal Space and Experience. The individual leaves or is forcefully taken from his/her family and enters what is called a liminal space. Examples of this would be when a young person leaves home and goes off to Marine boot camp. The initiate has his/her hair cut short, is given a uniform to wear, and is held accountable to a new and demanding set of rules. Another example would be when a young person leaves home and goes off to college, or when a young woman leaves her parents to enter a religious community. In the "old days," as my friends who are/were members of a Roman Catholic religious community have told me, the young woman, upon entering the community, was given a new name. Contact with her parents was forbidden during the years of novitiate. In some communities, she was not even allowed to attend a parent's funeral.

This stage in the process involves entering into a liminal space as a prelude to engaging in a transformative experience. Liminal, by the way, means threshold. The threshold under a door is neither in one room nor the other but is actually in both; it is "Betwixt and Between," to use Turner's words. One could think of Jesus' entry into the wilderness following his baptism as his entry into a liminal space.

4. The Initiatory Experience. While in this liminal space, the individual receives teachings from the elders. The elders of the tribe/culture/religion, etc., are the ones that oversee the initiatory process. This makes sense because the elders have already been through the process successfully. While in this space, the individual may have to master certain tasks that are deemed essential to functioning as an adult in that culture, and they may have to undergo certain ordeals to help them break away from thinking like a child. All the experiences that are a part of this stage are meant to prepare the person to be a responsibly functioning adult within that culture. For example, the Marines promise to make a young man into a *real* man, and, nowadays, a young woman into a *real* woman through teaching them to be warriors. Becoming a warrior is not only of benefit to the society, for the warrior is able to protect his/her people from enemies, but it also provides skills, abilities, and a way of thinking that is transferable to other areas of adult life. What happened to Jesus in the wilderness radically transformed his life.

5. The Return and Incorporation. When the individual completes his/her initiatory experience, he/she is welcomed back into his/her tribe/society/culture. However, the individual re-enters as one who is equipped to function in a new role, a more adult role. He/she has a new social status. This enables the individual to break the parental bond, get a job, become

financially and emotionally independent, get married, become a parent, and go on to make a constructive contribution to his/her society.

BTW, it seems to me that the people who fill our prisons, who have found themselves unable to live within the rules and mores of our society, who have established a socio-pathic relationship to their society, and who are not making a constructive contribution to their society, could be seen as examples of a failed rite of passage. If this is true, then have we failed them in some way?

6. The Celebration. The Ritual of Recognition. In many cultures and in many rites of passage, the successful transition from one social stage or status to another is celebrated by the society. An example would be graduation from high school or college. Another would be the final vows ceremony that marks the end of novitiate for a Roman Catholic religious. This ritual of recognition and celebration also has the salubrious effect of reminding the individual that there is no going back. When one takes vows during a wedding ceremony, celebrating the transition from being single to being married, the vows shared are an expression of a determination not to revert back to thinking and acting like a single person. As we have seen, this does not always work—at least in our culture.

So, what are the rites of passage in our culture, and how have they been affected by the pandemic restrictions? I think we could list the following rites of passage:

- Birth
- Going off to school for the first time
- The onset of puberty (e.g., menarche in girls)
- Coming of Age (e.g., Sweet Sixteen parties, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, obtaining a driver's license)
- Graduation from high school
- Graduation from college
- Marriage (bridal showers, the wedding ceremony)
- Pregnancy and Childbirth (baby showers)
- Retirement (the proverbial gold watch and/or a party)
- Death (wakes/calling hours, funerals, the Celebration of One's Life)

There should be ceremonies of some kind that attend these important life events. These rites of passage can/should guide the individuals through the transition and enable the individual to grow/self-actualize/individuate through the transition. Remember, rites of passage are beneficial both for the individual and the society/culture. When we think of our society, we could also add events like elections, inaugurations, and New Year's Eve/Day, which is the celebration of the transition from one year to the next.

Think about how these important life events, life transitions have been affected by the pandemic restrictions:

- Women are giving birth without their husband/spouse/partner with them and without their families coming to the hospital to greet the new baby and welcome him/her into the family.
- Coming of Age parties/celebrations have been severely restricted, even when they are tied to one's religious tradition.
- High school graduations have been cancelled or conducted virtually, with families driving to the high school in a line to pick up their son's/daughter's diploma. Not the same.
- College-age young people are opting to postpone attending college and take a year or more off since the courses are being offered only on-line, a long way from the "college experience" that they know they want and need.
- Brides-to-be are not being feted with bridal showers (you can never have too many toasters), and weddings (when the participants are socially responsible) are restricted to family only.
- Expectant mothers have to isolate themselves to protect their yet-to-be-born child from the effects of COVID-19; they have to forego the traditional baby showers that were communal

celebrations as well as a way to stock the supplies of cute little onesies for the expectant mom and dad.

- When the time comes, expectant mothers are dropped off at the hospital by their spouse to go through labor and delivery alone. Even when they come home from the hospital, their families, unless they have strictly quarantined, cannot visit.

- When loved ones are seriously ill or facing death, they are deprived of the comfort and support of loved ones; they have to go through this ordeal and transition alone. When they die, we are not able to meet as a community for a funeral service, a memorial service, a celebration of life. Even the simple graveside service can be attended by only a few persons wearing masks and maintaining a safe social distance from each other. (If we are responsible) we can't have a memorial service in our sanctuary, and we can't meet downstairs in the vestry for a luncheon provided by Women's Fellowship, a time when we can hug each other, share memories, reestablish contact with relatives we seldom see, and begin the grieving process, the process of mending the tear in the fabric of the family that was caused by death.

I personally feel the effects of the loss of some of these important rites of passage rituals because of how they have affected our family following the birth of our grandson five months ago, and how they have affected families and our church with the loss of several members of our church family to COVID-19 over the past eight months.

We also have recurring, traditional rituals in the church, in our church. On the Sunday after Labor Day, we traditionally celebrate Rally Day, a time when we come together for worship, which once again includes our choir, and share a potluck meal following the service. The first Sunday in October, we celebrate the anniversary of my call on October 7, 1997 to be the settled pastor of this church in a re-covenanting ceremony, renewing the vows we made to each other twenty-three years ago. The last Sunday in October, we (Protestants) celebrate Reformation Sunday. The first Sunday in November we celebrate All Souls' and All Saints' Day. After Thanksgiving/Stewardship Sunday, we enter into Advent, with its traditional themes of hope/longing, faith, love, and joy. Then, a highlight of the year for many, we have our beautiful candlelight Christmas Eve service of lessons and carols. The beginning of the year leads us into Lent, our beautiful Maundy Thursday service of Tenebrae, the United Parishes of Southborough Easter sunrise service by the side of the lake in Hopkinton, and our own Easter celebration in our sanctuary. These, and so many other special days, special worship services, mean so much to us.

It has occurred to me that in my reflections on the pandemic in general and our individual and collective response to this social crisis, we have been passing over these special days in the liturgical calendar, in the life of our church without mention. This morning, I would like us to think about and find a way to celebrate one of them, the one that we would have celebrated were we meeting as the gathered church for communion on the first Sunday in November. Today we would have celebrated All Saints' and All Souls' Sunday.

All Saints and All Souls, interestingly, coincides with the secular celebration of Halloween, which, because of the pandemic restrictions, was not much of a celebration this year. Actually, despite what some "Christians" maintain about Halloween being a Satanic plot to lead little children away from Christ, Halloween does have a religious dimension. In pre-Christian Europe, especially in Great Britain and Ireland, the Druids celebrated the change of the seasons on Sambain, October 31, the end of summer. The Druids saw evidence of God in nature; they experienced the presence of God in nature. This is why we call them pagan. I have no idea why Christians have traditionally persecuted pagans. Pagans have burned very few Christians at the stake. They have subjected very few Christians to the tortures of an inquisition. Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith and our understanding of God, but we need to remember that people worshipped God in many different forms long before Jesus was born.

Sambain was a time to remember loved ones who had died. It was a special time, a time set aside not only to remember relatives who had passed on to the other side, but to feel

their presence. It was like a momentary crack between the two worlds, a brief time when the door between this world and the next was open. People believed deceased relatives would come back and visit them. They left offerings of food to welcome the returning spirits and ensure that the spirits would be benevolent rather than malevolent. This is why we give candy to the little ghosts and goblins who come to our door and say, "Trick or treat!"

Later in the Middle Ages, the date of this celebration and time of remembrance of deceased relatives was set to coincide with All Souls' Day and All Saints' Day. Since November 1 was All Hallows' Day, the evening of October 31 became All Hallows' Eve or Halloween. That this date coincided with what we now celebrate as Reformation Day, the anniversary of the date when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the cathedral at Wittenberg, is purely coincidental.

On All Saints' Sunday, we traditionally try to recapture the original intent of All Souls' Day and All Saints' Day by setting aside some time in our service of worship to remember loved ones who have died. We set aside a time and a space to remember people whom we loved, people whom we *still* love. We not only want to *remember* these people; we want to actually *feel their presence* with us and within us. That is what we traditionally open ourselves to in a Service of Remembrance, Celebration, and Presence.

Traditionally, at the beginning of this service, I invite all of us to be quiet, to be still. I encourage us to stop thinking. Words can be helpful at times, but at other times they serve as a distraction. They can reveal the truth, but they can also cover and distort the truth. They can stand between us and the truth in such a way that we connect with or relate to the words or the concepts, not the Truth. On All Saints' Sunday, I invite or encourage us to move past the words to the experience.

I find myself in agreement with the teaching of Lao Tzu in poem 56 of the *Tao te Ching*:

*Those who know don't talk.
Those who talk don't know.*

I believe this is true in relation to the "big" things (which are not really "things") like God, the Kingdom of God, etc. I have always thought that I should tape this quote to the pulpit, so I have to look at it every time I begin to preach a sermon. At the very least, it would keep me humble. However, we need words to communicate. Jesus used words. Actually, as recorded in the synoptic gospels, Jesus used few words. His teaching showed more in his actions, in his bearing, in his being, in his great love.

In order to teach us about God and life, Jesus, like so many other religious or spiritual guides, separated or divided the world into two categories: earth and heaven; here and there; heaven and hell; sacred and secular; those who are saved and those who are not; health and sickness; the visible and the invisible; matter and spirit; light and darkness; life and death; this side of the grave and the other side of the grave.

This is the only way we know to talk about these things but, in reality, it is not like that. Everything contains its opposite within it--and all the opposites are contained in the great Unity of God. As we heard in the reading from Isaiah, God contains light and darkness, life and death, creation and destruction, weal and woe. God contains all the opposites, even male and female, within the great Unity of God's Spirit. A Zen teaching expresses this in the paradoxical statement "Not two; not one."

On this special Sunday, I challenge you to take down the barrier that you mistakenly believe separates you from your loved ones who have died. They are not on "the other side of the grave." They are here now, within you and all around you, in what our creeds have called the Communion of Saints. There is no "place" called heaven, a place that is somewhere other

than where we are. The distinction between here and there, between life and death, is a false distinction, a distinction which is a consequence of the words we use and the way we think. All is one in God. If you wish, you could think of our loved ones who have passed on as being "in the nearer presence of God," which is a phrase I believe is used in Episcopal burials.

If this is true, then we are not separated from our loved ones by time or space. We are not separated from our loved ones by what we know or describe as death. Our loved ones are with us, within us--now! Just as Jesus is with us and within us, though he lived and died 2,000 years ago.

As recorded in the Gospel of John, Jesus said,

In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

Jesus tells us that although the world will no longer see him, the disciples who love him will see him. They can never be separated from him because Jesus is in God, we are in Jesus, and Jesus is in us. Everything is contained within the great Unity of God. If this is true, then it is true of our loved ones who appear to have died. They are still with us.

As we know from our prayer on communion Sundays when we set aside some time to simply talk with Jesus, all we need to do is open ourselves to Jesus' presence and we will encounter him. We believe this experience is possible to those who approach the communion table in faith. When we join in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we are not simply *remembering* Jesus. Actually, we are remembering Jesus' words, what he said to his disciples as they sat around the table in the Upper Room. But if it is just a service of remembrance, we have missed the deeper meaning and experience of this sacrament. We are not celebrating or witnessing to a past event; we are *actually experiencing the presence of Christ* in our prayer and in the sacrament.

And so, on All Saints' Day, this special day in the church year, I encourage you to think of your loved ones the same way you think of Jesus. On one level you can set this time aside to remember them, to give thanks for their life, for the ways they touched and shaped your soul, for the ways you are changed because of them. But you can experience much more than this. You can experience the opening between the two worlds--because there are not two worlds. You can experience their presence with and within you on this special day--and in the days and weeks to come. In these moments, you can dissolve everything that you mistakenly think separates you from your loved ones, for there is really nothing separating you from them.

Traditionally, on All Saints' Sunday, everyone present for worship is invited to write down on a 3 x 5 card the names of several loved ones whose lives they celebrate and whom they wish us all to remember. The cards are brought forth with the offering. At the beginning of our Service of Remembrance, Celebration, and Presence, I slowly read all the names. As we listen to the names, I invite those present to close their eyes, stop their thinking, and open their heart. If you had been present to this service today, I would have invited you to listen, to listen for the names of your loved ones and to feel their presence. I would have also invited you to listen to the names of loved ones that were brought forth and offered up by others. We find we know and once again feel connected with many of these people.

If we can feel the presence of our loved ones both within us and with us, in this church, in a service of worship, we are not only celebrating All Saints' Day, we are experiencing it.

Let us try to keep these rites of passage, these precious rituals close to our hearts as we journey through this period when it is difficult for us to participate in them together as a community of faith.

And so, I say to you, be well. Stay safe. Be patient. Be disciplined. Persevere. Don't give up. Think of others. Care. Keep the faith. Focus on the broader, the bigger vision. See through the illusion, the delusion of the self-cherishing mind, the thief that takes away our sense of inner peace and that brings suffering to ourselves and others. Trust in God. Don't throw anything precious away. Repair the breaks in your life and in your relationships with gold. Take time to be with nature, to be in nature, to appreciate landscapes. Be socially responsible. Think about what it means to be a real Christian. Learn how to care and not to care; learn how to sit still, to be centered. Face what's wrong with our nation and the world, accept it, and then do everything you can to fix it. You are not working alone. Remove the log from your own eye that you might see your neighbor more clearly, that you might actually be able to help your neighbor remove the speck from his/her eye. Don't be so darned judgmental; it doesn't help anyone, even you. Restore the health to your third eye, your spiritual eye, to your way of seeing. Don't descend into darkness. Always be ready to question, to learn, to grow, to look at your own beliefs critically. Remember that the rituals, the religious celebrations that are denied to us as a community of faith during this period of pandemic restrictions are still alive and powerful, and that they carry their message of healing within our hearts. Above all, don't let the light go out.

Pastor Paul