

NOVEMBER 26, 2023



**Celebrating those who
have gone before us.**

**ST. JOHN UNITED
CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

**PRELUDE: “ It Is Well with My Soul/The Comforter
Has Come” Philip P. Bliss**

PENNIES FOR MISSION:

Open and Affirming Coalition

*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:

One: Know that the Holy One is God.

Many: We are God’s people.

One: Worship the Holy One with gladness;

Many: Come into God’s presence with singing.

One: Enter God’s gates with thanksgiving, and
God’s courts with praise.

Many: Make a joyful noise!

One: For God is good; God’s steadfast love
endures forever, and God’s faithfulness to all
generations.

**Many: Let us worship with thanks and joy! Let us
praise God in song and word and prayer!**

*UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

Gracious God, we long to know you better.

**Open us to recognize your presence, to receive you
fully, and to be ready to follow your leading.**

Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: NCH 305**

“You Servants of God”

SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Ezekial 34:11-16, 20-24

¹¹The LORD God proclaims: I myself will search for my flock and seek them out. ¹²As a shepherd seeks out the flock when some in the flock have been scattered, so will I seek out my flock. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered during the time of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³I will gather and lead them out from the countries and peoples, and I will bring them to their own fertile land. I will feed them on Israel’s highlands, along the riverbeds, and in all the inhabited places. ¹⁴I will feed them in good pasture, and their sheepfold will be there, on Israel’s lofty highlands. On Israel’s highlands, they will lie down in a secure fold and feed on green pastures. ¹⁵I myself will feed my flock and make them lie down. This is what the LORD God says. ¹⁶I will seek out the lost, bring back the strays, bind up the wounded, and strengthen the weak. But the fat and the strong I will destroy, because I will tend my sheep with justice. ²⁰So the LORD God proclaims to them: I will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. ²¹You shove with shoulder and flank, and with your horns you ram all the

weak sheep until you’ve scattered them outside. ²²But I will rescue my flock so that they will never again be prey. I will even judge between the sheep! ²³I will appoint for them a single shepherd, and he will feed them. My servant David will feed them. He will be their shepherd. ²⁴I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David will be their prince. I, the LORD, have spoken.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 100 Page 688

EPISTLE LESSON: Ephesians 1:15-23

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians

¹⁵Since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, this is the reason that ¹⁶I don’t stop giving thanks to God for you when I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation that makes God known to you. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart will have enough light to see what is the hope of God’s call, what is the richness of God’s glorious inheritance among believers, ¹⁹and what is the overwhelming greatness of God’s power that is working among us believers. This power is conferred by the energy of God’s powerful strength. ²⁰God’s power

was at work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and sat him at God's right side in the heavens, ²¹ far above every ruler and authority and power and angelic power, any power that might be named not only now but in the future. ²² God put everything under Christ's feet and made him head of everything in the church, ²³ which is his body. His body, the church, is the fullness of Christ, who fills everything in every way.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 25:31 – 46**

Judgment of the nations

³¹ "Now when the Human One^[a] comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left.

³⁴ "Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. ³⁵ I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me

clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.'

³⁷ "Then those who are righteous will reply to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸ When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

⁴⁰ "Then the king will reply to them, 'I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.'

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Get away from me, you who will receive terrible things. Go into the unending fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² I was hungry and you didn't give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you didn't give me anything to drink. ⁴³ I was a stranger and you didn't welcome me. I was naked and you didn't give me clothes to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'

⁴⁴ "Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and didn't do anything to help you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer, 'I assure you that when you haven't done it for one of the least of

these, you haven't done it for me.' ⁴⁶ And they will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous ones will go into eternal life."

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to good. Amen.

MESSAGE: "One of the Least of These"

**Thoughts by Rev. Fred Craddock.*

When you're on the last chapter of the book you are reading, you expect all the loose ends to come together and all the characters will have last words expressing love, they all kiss, and live happily-ever-after. That's sort of how our scripture text goes today . . . except for the happily-ever-after part.

*With this teaching, Jesus concludes his public instruction. Matthew, the author of this Gospel, wants this to be the lingering lesson. This text is not a parable but an apocalyptic vision. In Greek, the term *apokapypsis* simply means "revelation." This type of biblical literature emphasizes the lifting of the veil between heaven and earth and the revelation of God and God's plan for the world. (The Bible dictionary describes apocalyptic writings as being marked by distinctive literary features, particularly prediction of future events

and accounts of visionary experiences or journeys to heaven, often involving vivid symbolism.)

What I hear Jesus saying in this text is, "I've been teaching for 3 years and now comes the final exam. It all comes down to this."

*The purpose of this apocalyptic vision is not speculation about the end or for the fascination of the community. Rather the vision is the vehicle for ethical instruction. The heart of it is the coming ("Parousia" 24:3) of the Son of Man. His coming is not to the earth, but to the throne in heavenly glory. The scene is an enthronement, the Son of Man being installed as King and Judge.

*The "coming" (parousia) has been dealt with already: it will be sudden as the lightning (24:27); it will be on clouds of glory with great power (24:30-31); the day and hour are unknown (24:36-42); it will be as a burglar entering at night (24:43); it will be a time of reckoning and woe to the unprepared (24:45-51). Three parables have dealt with the delay of the coming (24:45-25:30). But now comes the full vision, glorious in appearance, cosmic in scope, and yet personal in that every life must appear before the judgment seat.

*Three elements in the vision draw special attention. First, the basis for the final judgment is

one's response to human need (vv.35-36). These needs are not unusual but present themselves in the ordinary coming and going of one's life. Second, both those at the right and at the left are surprised that they have so served or failed to serve Christ (vv.37-39, 44.) This touch of being surprised is a beautiful portrait of those saints whose service to others is so much a part of their behavior that they are embarrassed at the recital of their deeds and amazed that serve to those in need is serve to Christ. (**Thus, today we are honoring those who have come before us.**) And the element of surprise also describes vividly those who were busily religious in attention-getting ways but who bypassed the scenes of human anguish.

*And finally, the vision reminds the reader (**us**) that service to another is service to Christ. Amen.

**SPECIAL MUSIC: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"
by the Collinsville Chorale**

**SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE
TOTENFEST**

Sunday, November 26, is the last Sunday of the Church Year and, in the old German tradition, is the day for remembering those who have passed from this life into life eternal or whose funeral

service was held during the last Church Year. (The Church Year begins on the First Sunday of Advent and ends the Sunday before Advent.)

Totenfest, literally, the Festival of the Dead, is the time set aside in our worship service to name our sisters and brothers who no longer answer the call in this life, to commemorate their passing with a rose and a ringing of the chime, and to offer special prayers of thanksgiving for their journey with us on this earth.

"In every age, we have the gift and the pleasure to discover God anew, to race after the flowing tide of grace and let it wash over each and every one of us. The saints show us how it's done. We are glad to be honoring them today." –

Rev. Chelsey Hillyer

Those whom we celebrate today are people who loved their God. Perhaps they didn't verbalize their beliefs or were the epitome of perfect behavior, yet they were and still are loved by many.

As creations and gifts from God, we honor them today. They may have suffered much, in their earthly life. We, who remain here on earth, believe that in their death, they experience no hunger, nor thirst and no longer will they be

oppressed. They will inherit the Kingdom of God. We give thanks to God for their lives.

On this Day of Totenfest, we remember and celebrate saints of yesterday and of today; faithful people who set their hopes on Christ and who with their lives, praised God. May our hearts and minds be open to new realities in Christ. We want to be counted among saints who will inherit your kingdom.

May we, in this time together, commit ourselves to living lives that are pleasing to God.

Those we are honoring today are:

Darleen Jane Bax (Dehne)

11-11-1926 5-30-23

Nancy Kay Smith (Schamberger)

1-4-1954 7-8-2023

LET US PRAY IN UNISON: O Precious God of all times and of all faithful people We seek Your presence and Your blessing on us. We recognize ourselves as Yours. We are the faithful. We gather in this sacred place to witness to Your power as we remember those who have gone before us to Your loving arms. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer. Our gracious and ever-caring God, we come to you today to celebrate those who have gone before us. But we also celebrate your presence with the living. You remain with us through sad times and happy, and we are very grateful.

Knowing your love for us all, we lift up to you our world and our country. We pray for those who lead and govern in every nation, that they may lead with charity and justice in their hearts.

We pray for those who are sick, those who have died, those who have lost their jobs. We also remember all the front-line health care workers who work in extremely difficult places such as the hospitals in the Middle East which are being bombed in the conflict. Help all of us to care for our neighbors when they are in need.

We pray for all those on our prayer list; those who mourn, those who are lonely, those who are in pain, those who are weary of being ill. May they feel your loving arms around them and give them peace. We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, as we pray together . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: #812 Three-Fold Amen
Amen, Amen, A-men.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

OFFERTORY: "Just a Closer Walk with Thee"
Stewart Landon

***DOXOLOGY: # 780**
Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**
God of abundance, we give these offerings of material goods as our commitment to give back to you and to care for your people. Let our giving remind us to see Jesus all around us. Use our

offerings of money and of our lives for ministry to your purposes. Amen.

***SENDING HYMN: #299 "For All the Saints"**

***BENEDICTION:**

May God give you wisdom and revelation.
May the eyes of your heart be enlightened.
May you know the hope to which God has called you, And may the blessings of the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sustainer go with you this day and always. Amen.

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE: "Let There Be Peace on Earth"**

***POSTLUDE: "Festal Postlude" Chester Nordman**