

“God of Unending Possibilities”
Sermon by Rev. Tom Warren, Pastor
Peace United Church of Christ
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I am coming down this morning because I'm going to ask all of you to help me with the sermon today. If you didn't notice it (but I suspect you did), in the last couple of days especially, we have been entertained by ghosts, goblins and spirits from the other world. We call this, of course, Halloween. In our culture we have made this quite a holiday. It is a lot of fun, and it is now a great economic engine. We spent millions, perhaps billions, of dollars on Halloween stuff, but it is interesting that we use it as an entertaining type of thing. We love to have children come to our homes and do tricks and treats. Now we have trunks and treats. We have new traditions taking shape.

On some level, it is about this fascination we have with the dead, with spirits that are not earthly anymore but inhabit a different realm—whatever we might call that realm. The church, in all of its forms, has various traditions on how we deal with the day, with those who are in different realms.

You may have seen recently that Our Lady of Grace Roman Catholic Church, which is right up the street, welcomed a saint into their sanctuary. Eleven-year-old Maria Goretti is a saint of the Roman Catholic Church, and they actually had in their sanctuary her remains in kind of a see-through coffin. You may have seen that in the newspaper. She is the patron saint of Mercy. Maria Goretti is the patron saint of Mercy because she was murdered as an 11 year old in Italy in 1902, and she forgave her killer on her death bed and pleaded for her killer to embrace the God of love who had forgiven her also, so she is a saint of Mercy—Saint Maria.

I want to be clear about saints since we don't really do that tradition as much in the Protestant tradition. Saints in the Roman Catholic Church are not to be worshipped, I learned, but it is through saints that we see God revealed in their lives, so saints are people through whom we see God revealed in the way they lived their lives, so I think the concept of saints is very important.

On Facebook yesterday was an interesting photo from my hometown, Oneida, New York. They had photos of a big crowd of people in the Oneida community cemetery during the day, with a lecture going on as they sat there around the graves learning about all who had been buried in that cemetery and what their lives told about the history of Oneida and history about the Oneida community which was a Christian commune, and the history of Oneida community silverware. All those souls are in that cemetery and their lives told stories of that particular community and its incredible history. Included in those souls are my dad, my mother, my stepmother, and my two siblings, twins, who died at a very early age. They are all in that cemetery so there are quite some stories there. I hope the stories about my dad don't actually get out because that would not be very funny! Nonetheless, it is interesting that was up there, and they were telling through those graves and those who were buried in that cemetery stories and the history of that community up in New York.

In Mexico, and much of Latin America, they do this and call it The Day of the Dead—Dia de Muertas. The people of that culture, particularly Mexico, but also Guatemala, Latin America and other countries, spend the day (and a couple of days) going to their ancestors' graves, going into cemeteries and having celebrations—food, festivities, honoring the dead, talking with the dead and having celebrations.

My wife, Kim, was in Guatemala a number of years ago on The Day of the Dead and was able to participate with her sponsor family and to go to the cemetery and have a party to celebrate those who had died as if they were still alive. I think that is very important, perhaps something we have lost in our tradition here in the Protestant church. Do these souls ever really go away? We believe in this other

life, in resurrection and in eternal life, and I think it's worth thinking about. How do these voices from the dead continue to inform our lives and continue to inform our world and continue to shape us as the people that we are?

By the way, the stole that I am wearing today is white. I am wearing it because this is All Saints Sunday—white being a symbolic color of eternal life and of purity and all that kind of stuff, so it's symbolically in my stole today.

I want to take the opportunity now to just take a second and ask all of you to share a saint in your lives. Who is a saint who has shaped your life, and how did they touch your life? Just think for a few seconds and when you are ready, raise your hand and I'll give you the microphone, but I want you to share a saint who touched your life, who is no longer here on earth but continues to shape your life and how they shaped your life here on earth. Who is that saint in your life?

Dorothy Meeks: The saint in my life was Lola Klutz. She was one of the best friends I ever had, and I miss her so much.

Pastor replied: And Lola Klutz was a saint to this church and that was wonderful—wonderful!

Ted Wilkinson: My grandmother, Katherine Wilkinson, who taught me almost everything I know about manners, and she knew how to navigate us around a fancy dinner and what silverware to use.

Roger True: My dad. He played Santa Claus from 1970 until 2002. To this day people still talk about that just like last night. Someone said "Thanks for carrying on that tradition at your house as your dad did".

Cindy Spillers: My mother and father. To this day, almost daily, I hear my dad saying "Everything will all work out" and it always does. About my mother, the greatest thing she taught me that sometimes you do what you know you should do whether you want to or not.

James Baker: My father. (Inaudible).

David Murray: My wife, Mary Ann. I love her, but I admire and respect her, and she has just amazed me how she has stood up to her disease and never lets it get her down. She just puts it out of her mind and lives each day for today.

Pastor Tom: A guy in our community when I was 15 years old was a rather unusual saint to me. Some of my family here today will remember this name. His name was Frank Zofie. I would describe him as a curmudgeon—kind of cranky but funny, a friend of my father. He had a big pot belly on him, probably from drinking too much. I'm not sure about that, but I remember the pot belly. When I was 15, I was pretty much living life out of a box, and he said to me one day when I was actually working with him at a golf tournament (as he was overseeing me because I was doing some project related to the golf tournament), "You know what, Tom? I think you're going to turn out all right." This was at a time when I wasn't sure what I was going to turn out to be, so saints come to us in very different forms. They have the words we need. They are guides in our lives. They are voices that continue to shape us as we get older, and we should all be grateful for the saints in our midst because they are all around us, so we give thanks and praise to God for the saints who have touched our lives. Thanks be to God. Amen.