

Sermon Title: **“Heavenly Banquet”**

Bible: **Revelation 21:1-6a & John 11:32-44**

When: on All Saints Sunday, November 3, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Halloween and All Saints Sunday

Do you like Halloween? How was your Halloween? Did you wear a costume? Did you receive a lot of candies or did you give a lot of candies? Do you still have any leftover candies? You can bring some to the church to share! I believe that many of us like candies. In Korea, only a few people celebrate Halloween, and even many Korean churches do not celebrate Halloween or even All Saints Sunday. How about us? Do we celebrate All Saints Day or Sunday?

We, the United Methodists, celebrate All Saints Day and Sunday, because we respect tradition, even though Halloween is more popular. Actually, there is a connection between Halloween and All Saints Day. When is Halloween? It is October 31st. When is All Saints Day? It is November 1st. And the word Halloween actually means “the evening of Hallows.” And what does it mean by “Hallows”? Let me recite the Lord's prayer. “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...” Hallowed has the same root, which means holy! And

Hallows means the holy ones, which can be translated into “saints.” So, Halloween can mean the evening of the holy ones, or the evening of the saints. But why the evening? Many ancient cultures in the Middle East start the day with sunset, not with sunrise. We can find this example in the Bible, too. Genesis 1:5 says “God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day.” So, the service of this evening of the saints falls on November 1st in Western Christianity.

Of course, any tradition cannot exist by itself alone. We can see that many cultures’ popular festivals and the power of capitalism has influenced the current Halloween, with things such as pumpkins, costumes, candies, etc. But many United Methodist churches still celebrate not only Halloween in their own way and context, but also All Saints Sunday, usually after November 1st. Our founder, John Wesley, loved All Saints Day. In his journal on November 1, 1767, he called it “a festival I truly love,” and on the same day in 1788, he wrote, “I always find this a comfortable day,” and the following year in 1789, he mentioned it as “a day that I peculiarly love.” And do you like All Saints Sunday?

2. Our Saints

After I became a Methodist in the United States, I learned about All Saints Sunday. I fell in love with it! That’s because of all the saints that I have met. In the United Methodist culture, we do not have any system whereby people are elected to sainthood. We do not pray to saints, and we do not believe that they serve as mediators to God. Of course, we recognize our faith ancestors as our saints, like Matthew, Paul, John, Luke, and the early church’s many

followers of Jesus. Most importantly, we call people “saints” because they were examples to us of how to live and love, and how to follow Jesus. In this sense, every Christian can be considered a saint. The apostle Paul said in his letter to the Romans, chapter 1, verse 7: “To all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints; Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This was even before any official church was established. Just like Paul did, I will say that you are God’s beloved ones, and you are the saints to me. We are the saints to each other, because we experience God’s grace, love and mercy, because we forgive each other and embrace each other, and because we learn from each other. How about making eye contact with each other, and confessing that “you are my saint”?

3. Heavenly Banquet

Especially, on this All Saints Sunday, I would like for our church to remember our saints, our church members and friends, our loved ones who passed away in the past year: *Edna Holcomb, Alison Hanvey, Donald Showen, Earline Shields, Gail Dettman, and Bud Burchell*. (Ring the gong).

And who were your saints? Who loved you? Who showed how to follow Jesus? We will also have Communion today. There are many meanings of Communion. The heavenly banquet is one of the meanings, because when we take bread and share a cup, this Communion is the foretaste of the heavenly banquet with our loved ones who cannot talk and touch us any more on the earth. As Jesus wept with Mary and Martha at the tomb of Lazarus, when we grieve, and when we miss our loved ones, may God’s comfort and compassion be

with all of us. Thank you so much for bringing the photos and reminders of your loved ones who have passed away. And for those who did not bring any, there will be a time to lift up the names of the loved ones in the middle of Communion. With God's people on earth and all the company of heaven, we will praise our Lord and join their unending hymn.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." We are people of faith. We are people of hope for a new heaven and a new earth! Death will be no more. Mourning and crying and pain will be no more. The first things have passed away and God will make all things new! Until we meet our loved ones in heaven, until we feast at Christ's heavenly banquet all together, let us love each other! Let us forgive each other! Let us follow our Lord Jesus Christ! And let us taste the heavenly banquet here and now!

Closing Prayer

Loving and living God, we come to you with our pain, our sorrow, and with the deaths of our loved ones. Please show us your comfort, your hope, and your resurrection! When we break the bread, when we share the cup, please give us faith for the heavenly banquet. Until we meet our loved ones and you face-to-face, please help and lead us to love and to serve you in this world! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.