

First I want to say another great big thank you to Steve Dempster for leading worship last Sunday while I was away. Thank you!! Round of applause! If you didn't get a chance to listen to Steve's sermon, I encourage you to watch last week's service on YouTube, Facebook or find it on our website. He made it look easy didn't he?

It IS work to organize and lead worship, put together a sermon and preach it, which is exactly what Steve said to me after his experience last Sunday. It's also something that ANYONE can do. What I'm called here to do as your pastor isn't anything beyond ordinary, except that I know I'm called to do this full time and as the main focus of my vocation. I think that's the main difference between what you all are doing in ministry in so many ways for our church and what I'm appointed here to do. I just do this full time as my only work. And trust me - I think about you all and the church and faith constantly - except my Sabbath day, Friday, when I take time off to rest and seek Joy.

Also a big thank you to Aaron Halsey for helping us not only continue to be online, but upgrade a few things so now we're live streaming right now on Facebook and the service is uploaded basically right after worship to YouTube rather than having to wait later in the day to see it. If you haven't watched our worship online recently, please, please look at it. Ernie on sound and Aaron on video are providing a REALLY well done worship experience. Thank you so much!!

Well I'm excited to help us look toward the next four weeks as we move through this new season before us. As we drive around town, walk in our neighborhoods, shop in stores and watch TV we're surrounded by images pointing us toward Halloween. Many of us might have different opinions of Halloween as Christians. For me, I did allow my kids to wear costumes and trick or treat and I have a few Halloween decorations out at my home that I've gathered over the years. But I love this season not because of Halloween, but because of a very, very special day in our Christian Calendar - the day right after Halloween - November 1st - All Saints Day.

Since November 1st is a Monday this year, as a church we'll celebrate All Saints Day on November 7, the following Sunday.

All Saints Day is the day we recognize and celebrate the lives of those church members, constituents and all other people special to us who have passed on from this life - we call them the Saints that have gone on before us - since the last All Saints Day. For instance, Beulah Hensien passed away December 16 2020, but because it was after All Saints Day last year, we'll recognize her this year. So this year we'll recognize her as well as 5 others - Pat Harns, Georiana Kelly, Guy Parks, Sally Carlson and Ray Encino.

What we do on All Saints Day is everyone in worship will have the chance to submit names during worship - I'll have a special way we'll gather those names - and we'll speak those names out loud, ring a bell in recognition of their life and light a candle in their honor on a special table we'll have in front here. This All Saints Day is particularly special, as there are some who, due to Covid, weren't able to have services in person.

I've also had some of you tell me you'd really like to hear messages in worship about what it means to be United Methodist - what is the difference between this church and other churches - and there really are quite a few attributes that make this a United Methodist denomination, so I decided to take these next four weeks - as we move toward Halloween and All Saints Day to talk about the United Methodist Perspective on Death and Resurrection and invite you to think about your own beliefs on these very important aspects of faith and spirituality. AND I'll be taking time in my sermons to share just a bit about these six people - these saints who have gone on before us - and how they impacted our world with their lives.

That's one of the reasons why I LOVE being part of a worshipping community and it's so VITAL to me. This is a place and a community where we get to know each other if we let ourselves be known and we remember each other now and even after death. Today our focus is on the United Methodist perspective of "Life after Death" - the question is What do United Methodists believe happens to a person after they die? Do they go directly to heaven or hell or to a holding place until Christ returns for the final judgement?

The Word of God to me is SO important to me. Though, personally, I take it seriously, not

literally and believe it's inspired by God yet written by men. So I'd like to begin by reading two other short scripture passages besides the one Sharon read from Romans in order to understand more about what happens after a person dies.

I encourage you, always, if you are able, to look at these words with me in your own Bible you brought or a Bible app on your device or the Bible under the chair in front of you. First we'll turn together to Matthew 12:38-42.

I believe this is a helpful passage to read when thinking about Life after Death, because of verse 40 where it says, "Like Jonah, three days and nights in the fish's belly, the Son of Man will be gone three days and nights in a deep grave."

I wanted to find out more about that phrase "a deep grave", so I looked at the original Greek language for that phrase and found that it's more accurately translated "the heart of the earth". What I wound up learning even more about than I knew before were the words used in the Bible for PLACES or LOCATIONS where souls go after they die.

What words automatically come to mind for you when you think of a location for a person after death? Do you believe in a place you might call heaven? Where do you imagine that to be? Do you believe in a place you might call hell? Where might that be? Do you believe there is anything after death or that death is the end of existence?

To me - these are really interesting and pivotal questions of our faith. In the Old and New Testament, where we normally see the word "hell" in our English Bible translations, there are at least four different words used in the original Hebrew & Greek. I want to tell you about two of them today.

Sheol is a Hebrew word in the Old Testament, which is sometimes translated as "hell", but that's not very accurate, because the Hebrew, or Jewish, people believed that when a person died, every soul went to sheol, but there were two - for lack of a better word - sections in Sheol - one was a place of torment and one was a place of paradise or blessing, also known as Abraham's bosom. So Sheol was not just what we would think of as "hell", but more a resting place for every soul, made up of two sections.

This scriptural story from Luke 16:19-31 is helpful to read as we think about this. It might be

familiar to you. I invite you to turn with me to Luke 16:19-31.

In this story we see that distinction between the place of torment and paradise.

Hades is a Greek word used in the New Testament also translated as hell, basically the same as Sheol. So Sheol and Hades are interchangeable, just different languages.

When these places are spoken about in the Bible, the words used to describe them are "going down" and "lower parts of the earth" and "nether parts of the earth". In the Matthew passage we have "the heart of the earth". Heart in Greek is Kardia and is mentioned over 800 times in scripture, but NEVER refers to the literal physical pump that drives blood through our bodies. Kardia, heart, is ONLY used figuratively. Heart means something deep, the core, innermost parts - so Biblically the repository of souls, up until Jesus' resurrection - at least Biblically was some place down deep in the earth, that's why it says in the heart of the earth. Like in the Apostles Creed we say Jesus "was crucified, died and was buried. He DESCENDED TO THE DEAD. On the third day He ROSE again."

Just like it says in Matthew, during the time between Jesus' death and resurrection, the "three days", Jesus' soul went to Sheol or Hades. The traditional understanding was that Jesus went to "free" those who were in Sheol/Hades and took them with Him UP to heaven where Jesus now sits at God's right hand. So since Jesus' resurrection, Biblically, those who are "born again" go to heaven and those who refuse Christ go to Sheol/Hades. In these places, they wait for Christ's second coming to earth. At that time, as it says in 1 Corinthians 15:51 & 52 "I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we all will be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. The dead will be raised imperishable and we will all be changed.

As for the United Methodist beliefs about this - you may be relieved to hear or annoyed to hear - as with some other issues of faith - we don't provide a clear cut answer in our doctrinal statements about this.

We have a book - The Book of Discipline - which does line out quite a few important theological beliefs in the beginning portion - but this question is not directly answered. And it's because, though we

have some Biblical description about what happens to a person after death, it in no way makes it absolutely clear. I, personally, like to point to the passage when Jesus is on the cross and says to the thief who believes in him "Today you will be with me in paradise - which was, as I said, a reference to being with the righteous and apparently, where Jesus is also." This is, for me, a wonderful idea to believe about what happens to a person after death.

The last thing I'll say about this is that as United Methodists, we DO believe in resurrection and the return of Jesus and judgement on the last day - which I'll say more about in the next few weeks as we keep thinking about Death and Resurrection from a United Methodist perspective.

Before I close, I have a few words to share with you about Patricia Stephens Harns, better known as Pat - who was born October 3, 1930 and passed away January 4, 2021. Pat was a member of Corona UMC and Pat's husband, Jim, though a Christian Scientist, was connected to Corona and continues to stay connected through the Thursday morning Bible study on Zoom every week.

Pat was one of those dear ones unable to have an in-person service since Covid kept us apart. Just a few weeks ago, Jim traveled with his family to Utah where they had a family time of remembrance for Pat and planted these three trees with some of her ashes mixed in. The trees represent their children together - two biological - Joy and Kirk - and then together the two they adopted - Carol and Debbie. Pat was an artist. And to close out my message for today, please give a listen to Jim Harns, who I had the pleasure of visiting last week, and hear him say a few more words about Pat and her art. (iMovie - Jim Harns).