**First United Methodist Church**

**618 Eighth Street**

**Columbus, Indiana 47201**

**Rev. Howard E. Boles**

**November 3, 2024**

“Remembering What They Gave”

Text: Mark 12:38-44

There is a poem that I like to read at weddings. It entitled, “Gather Up Crumbs” and was written by Gunilla Norris. It goes like this:

Be careful with the crumbs.

Do not overlook them.

Be careful with the crumbs;

the little chances to love.

the tiny gestures, the morsels

that feed, the minims.

Take care of the crumbs;

a look, a laugh, a smile,

a teardrop, an open hand. Take care

of the crumbs. They are food also.

Do not let them fall.

Gather them. Cherish them.

What I love about that poem is the celebration of the very ordinary things of life. But even those ordinary things are packed with meaning and significance. A look, a smile, a teardrop. A simple touch. A kind word. It is those little things, small as a crumb of bread, that can be enough to lift our spirits and sustain our lives.

On a more profound level, in his book, “Man’s Search for Meaning” Viktor Frankl shares his experiences from a WWII Concentration Camp. He noted that you could see when someone was about to give up hope. They didn’t have to say a word, you could just tell that they were losing their will to live. It was in such moments that fellow prisoners would try to offer a bit of encouragement to keep going. They would offer a piece of their own bread. In the thin soup that they were served, the one serving the meal might dip the ladle deeper into the vat with the possibility of finding one small piece of carrot or a pea to place into the soup. Those little things could often be sufficient to sustain someone for one more day.

We have gathered this morning to celebrate the saints. And most of what we remember is very common, even very ordinary. And I suspect that many of those we remember today would be reticent to call themselves saints. But I remember the words of the late Hoosier author Kurt Vonnegut who said, “You meet saints everywhere. They can be anywhere. They are people behaving decently in an indecent society.” That is what we are remembering. Not extraordinary events or superhuman feats. We remember good people doing ordinary things with great love and kindness.

It is the very point Jesus was making in today’s gospel lesson. He begins by talking about the religious leaders who like to showcase their goodness. They want everyone to know how important they are. And so they make a big deal of their actions.

But then he will contrast this with a story. Jesus sat down beside the treasury, the place where everyone put their offerings. And from that vantage point, he does a very unusual thing. He watches what gifts people put into the treasury. It is a very nosy thing for him to do and it may have made folks a bit uncomfortable.

Jesus noticed that there were those who were quite proud of showing what they had given. They didn’t mind if everyone saw it and in fact were pleased when this was the case. Then came a poor widow. She put two copper coins into the collection box. Her gift was quite small, about a penny by today’s standards. It was the kind of money that if the coins had been lying on the ground, most people would have walked right over without bothering to bend down and pick them up. This is what the unnamed widow put into the collection.

Watching this, Jesus does something else unusual. He celebrates her gift. He calls his disciples over to tell them about what he had just seen. It wasn’t about the size of the gift. This woman had given a small gift, but it was meaningful to her and that was worth celebrating.

Saints are people who are behaving decently in an indecent society. Though the problems around us seem so daunting, so overwhelming, the saints are the people who dare to believe that their gift is important and can make a difference. And as Jesus pointed out, they do. They matter. They are important. And we are all the better because these people dared to share their gifts. Today we give thanks for their lives, their legacies, and the ways in which they have made us, our community and our world, a little bit better.

I think of Shirley Carter who was a saint for loving her wonderful rascal of a husband, Joe. Joe and Shirley were active supporters of the mission work of this church. For many years they were responsible for taking the youth of this church on work projects. And their actions not only helped the people they served, by repairing homes and other projects, but it had a lasting impact upon the youth as well. This summer when our youth went on a mission trip to Florida, I so wanted to call Shirley and tell her about it. I know she would have been proud and delighted to hear how this ministry was continuing.

Today we remember Phil Houston and the lives he touched through his leadership as a school principal. There is no way to estimate the impact he had upon so many students. At his funeral we told the story of a family trip to New York City. Phil was on the subway during rush hour and the car was full of people. Looking around he made the comment that New York was the kind of place someone could go if they wanted to disappear. No sooner had he spoken those words that a voice called out, “Mr. Houston?” Even in New York City, Phil could not disappear.

I think of Rebecca Reed and recall her warm hospitality and how she made people feel welcome. Becky took pride in looking good and loved to help others shine through her caring work as a beautician.

At Larry Mast’s funeral I used the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan where Jesus told about a man who was beaten and robbed and left on the side of the road. Several people passed by but did nothing. Finally, a Samaritan came upon the scene, and he went out of his way to care for the wounded man. That story seemed to sum up Larry’s life so well. Once while he was out, he came upon a motorcycle accident. He said to his family, “I’ve got to stop.” He couldn’t not help. He gently and carefully administered care until the paramedics arrived. He was a caring soul whose actions not only brought comfort to those who were hurting, but also invited us to do the same.

Gail and Russ Davis moved the Zionsville a few years ago, but I am grateful that I had the chance to get to know them before they moved. Gail was one of those people you would describe as generous to a fault. However she could help, whether by volunteering or donating items, she was a person you knew you could call on.

When I think of Bob Neth, what comes to mind is a note he sent me before he and Carolyn moved to Atlanta. I keep a few notes in my files to reread during difficult times. When I feel discouraged or weary, I pull out those letters to lift my spirit. Just before he moved, Bob wrote one such letter that was so kind and encouraging and complimentary that I cannot read it without feeling renewed. I have turned to those words on many occasions and recall his kindness with great appreciation.

As with many of those we remember today, there are so many things I could say about Jerry Hinderliter. I loved that he often shared cartoons or funny stories. On many Sundays, he would come see me in my office and share something lighthearted and playful. Jerry had a reputation as a person who could fix anything. If there was anything you needed, he was the person to call. One sweet example of that was when one of the grandkids had a stuffed animal that had a hole. Jerry was quite capable with needle and thread and was able to repair the stuffed animal.

There were many warm, wonderful stories shared at the funeral for Kwok-Sang Chui. The stories told of a humble man who moved to a foreign country, went on to developed several patents, earned his PhD., was a teacher, a mentor, a friend. But through it all he remained mild-mannered, big-hearted, and humble. He was a wizard in the kitchen and used his cooking skills to bring people together and build loving relationships and supportive community. And he looked back upon it all and surmised that all the good things in his life were due to the grace of God and the love of his wife, Linda.

Such relationships were part of what we remembered about Ron Ellis. His love and care for his wife Beverly and his love for his children. I shared the memory of being at his home the day Beverly died and how deeply he felt that loss. We sat in the front room, and he told story after story about his love for her.

We remembered Bud Lutes only last week as a rather strong, opinionated man. He could sometimes be frugal to the point of denying himself things that he needed. But as I listened to those stories, I heard something else beneath the surface. He was frugal toward himself, but generous toward those around him. He would forgo a new pair of shoes, but in so doing he was setting money aside for his children’s college fund. He was willing to sacrifice for their well-being. And we also remembered how he and Jennie would take long walks almost every day, sometimes 3-4 miles at a time. And what a gift those times had been.

One of the things about the storytelling at a funeral is that it invites others to share stories, some of which may have been forgotten or overlooked. We told some great stories at Bill Rumsey’s funeral, but just this week, Nancy shared about his first few weeks pastoring a church in Pennsylvania. The youth were going skating on Saturday night and they wanted the new pastor to come along. Bill didn’t know how to skate, but like many good pastors, he did whatever was needed. He laced up the skates and went out with two of the church elders on each side keeping him steady. After the first lap around the rink, Bill told them not to let go, he wasn’t confident yet. About that time an energetic youth bumped into them sending them all to the ground. Bill broke his wrist. The other hand flew in the other direction and hit one of the elders in the face. On Sunday morning, in this new church, Bill showed up with his hand in a cast and an elder with a black eye. What a way to begin your ministry!

We remembered Shirley Lyster as a strong woman with a calling to teach. And teach she did. For 52 ½ years. Her friends and students used words like intelligent, inquisitive, genuine, a voracious reader, fascinating storyteller, beautiful, a visionary, a leader. In this era in which people are still attempting to ban good literature, I think of Shirley’s courage amid the protests. She was and will always be an inspiration to me.

When we were putting the service together, we didn’t anticipate adding one more name to the list. But sadly, we include Helen Scroggins in our remembrances today. She was a woman who knew the importance of bringing people together and went out of her way to remember every birthday and anniversary and look for any occasion to bring people together.

Last Sunday night Helen went to the hospital with chest pains. The doctors were running tests and she and her family were waiting in the E.R. She asked her husband Bob what the sermon had been about that morning. They had watched it together online. He reminded her that Pastor Mackenzie had preached about the woman who touched the hem of Jesus’s garment and was healed. She nodded in remembrance.

Then she said, “I just touched the hem of Jesus’ garment.” And then she passed.

When I heard that story it brought both chills and tears to my eyes. Healing doesn’t always look like what we think it should. There isn’t one of these people that we have named here today, not one person in our lives who has passed, that we haven’t wished for one more day. Just one more conversation. A little more time together. But there is always that sad finality. And we are left with the memories, the stories. And while that seems so small, it is an incredible gift. Those little gifts become treasures that we can cherish. In those memories we are inspired and challenged and invited to become something more than what we thought, because of these individuals. We are understandably sad for all those we remember, those who were named and those we cherish in our hearts. But we also know that we are the better for having known them.

Jesus sat down in the Temple, and he watched what people gave. An unnamed widow came and put a small token into the treasury with no fanfare, no applause or great recognition. But he saw something in that gift. And he knew it was important. He knew it mattered. Likewise today, we remember these loved ones who have shared their gifts in our lives, and we are blessed to have known them.