

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

October 30, 2011

October Theme: A SEASON OF SAINTS

Today's Saints:

The Apostle John & O.J. Scott



A Season of Saints

by Larry Moffet, Senior Pastor

This week join me in doing something simple once or twice a day: stretch out your hand (palm up). It's a physical thing to help us remember we've received help from others and that we're here to give help to others. It's a way you can remind yourself you are here to serve others and others have served you. When you give someone directions: "It's two blocks that way"... when you find the item you're looking for at the store: "There's where the pizza mix is", when you see a tree full of beautiful color: "Look at that beautiful tree." *More on this later.*

Thanks for participating in this Season of Saints. The stories of lives of people who have made a difference strengthen us. The word "saint" does not mean "perfect person." In the New Testament it means "a follower," "one set apart" or "one who serves." Jesus said:

¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant.

O.J. Scott served First Church as Associate Pastor. He and his spouse Sue came here from Mississippi. Some of you have great stories about Sue and Scott. I remember watching him when I was a layperson sitting in the balcony, marveling at the way he was always engaging everybody in worship, in education, in getting to know each other.

He was a relentless force of positive energy.

Scott was in charge of all Education, children and adults. Tom, our building manager remembers he never was discouraged when he would plan and set up a teacher training and only a few showed up. He kept at it. I marveled at his kind care in helping lay people get set up to read scripture and in pointing out ways they could use inclusive language.

Scott was so full of crazy humor and used his offbeat take on life to help people understand the faith. He had a fun version of the Bible story of Isaac and Rebecca's twins, Esau and Jacob – Esau was hairy and loved to hunt, and Jacob was always trying to wrestle the firstborn power role from his slightly older twin. So Scott renamed the twins "Hairy and Grabby."

When I called Sue and Scott this week and told him that we were using him as a modern day Saint, Scott said "Really! You have the aquifer to worry about." Sue remembered things I have heard about: Scott began using bells at Christmas, palms and processions at Easter, and something major at every single church holiday we celebrated.

"Scott was always doing something crazy with people," she said.

Scott and I talked a mile a minute. Then Sue broke in, saying "Larry, when I told Scott you were using him as a modern saint, I said 'This is so funny. I hardly ever think of that--you as a saint.' Scott said 'Really? I think about that all the time!'" I reminded Sue that before the 1989 hymnal came out Scott had the 8:30 service sing from "Songbook for Saints and Sinners," maybe because he realized Sainthood and sinner status are not that far apart!"

Scott told a great story on himself, saying "Since it is important to remember that ordinary modern day saints' have 'feet of clay,' let me tell you about one experience I had at First Church. One of the many great events that occurred while serving at First was the national laboratory school for church school teachers and elementary children. There were children's teachers from all over the United States descending on the

basement of the church for a week of training and practice in the learning center approach to church education. Because First Church had pioneered this ministry, we were a “natural” to host this event. The children's coordinator and I had spent months lining up children's classes to be held after public school as well as during the weekend. The church basement was transformed into a new scene for each new daily session. Children seemed to be excited to come, and teachers spent untold hours preparing the curriculum, setting up environments and securing supplies. Sunday morning arrived and our teaching team was to be in charge. I thought it seemed odd when I arrived an hour before the service and the parking lot was full of cars. Then I heard the 8:30 worshipers singing in West Vestry. What was going on?

I went to the basement and everyone was in place: teachers were leading, children were actively involved. Stunned, I asked what time it was from an observing teacher. To this day I remember her saying, “O Scott, did you forget to reset your clock for the time change!” Well, I never have forgotten time changes to this day.” Even making fun of himself Scott is a teacher-leader!

“The memories of the congregation as well as the staff of First remain with me as both a great time as well as a great ‘time change’ in my life.”

The Apostle John is our other Saint today. His students probably compiled the Gospel, the three John Epistles, and Book of Revelation that were all given his name. We don't know much about John. He may have been the “Beloved Disciple” who was closest to Jesus at the Last Supper.

This much we do know: he taught many leaders in the earliest days of the Christian Church. Some believe he lived long enough to nurture four generations of great leaders. All during great persecution.

The lives of people here in this congregation and throughout the ages of Christianity point to (show us...) the amazing life of Jesus Christ.

There are so many aspects, so many dimensions of Jesus you can follow **you can follow the healer... or the listener... the friend...**

**the challenger of staus quo... or the comforter
you can follow the teacher... or the conquerer of death**

One thing all these aspects of his life have in common is “servant leader”

¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant.

**¹²All who exalt themselves will be humbled,
and all who humble themselves will be exalted.**

So sometime this week, instead of pointing, stretch out your hand, palm up, ready to receive the gifts of those who are serving you...

They are Christ to you in that moment.

Or stretch out your hand, ready to give... support, encouragement, admiration, appreciation. **You are Christ in that moment.**

The Saints – all of them – will be with us – showing us the way...

For a blessing on all human labor,
and for the right use of all creation
we pray to you

for the poor, the persecuted, the sick and all who suffer
we pray to you

for refugees, prisoners, and all in who are in danger
we pray to you

For ourselves, and for the grace of the Holy Spirit
to amend our lives
we pray to you

For all who in the Communion of the Saints
and for all whose faith is known only to you,
we pray to you...

Robert Schnase, writes,

The notion of building nests is often used as a metaphor to describe people successfully providing for their own comforts. If someone arrives at a career position of some ease and security, friends say, “You’ve built yourself quite a nest for yourself here!” . . . The word nest often connotes shelter, coziness, homelike, comfortable.

In actual fact, the nests which birds build are not for the birds who build them, but for their young, for the next generation, for the future of the species. The hours of carrying straw, sticks, and mud; the days of defensive watchfulness; and the weeks of endless feeding are all for the benefit of the new ones, the young, the future.

Now consider “nests” we build in our churches. The buildings, programs, ministries, job descriptions, and services we build—are they for our own comfort and coziness? Or are they to further the faith and provide for future generations? Does our giving serve us and our needs or serve God by serving the mission of the church to reach new people? Vibrant, fruitful congregations focus as much energy, prayer, and planning on those who are outside the congregation as they do on those who are already active in the congregation.

EPISTLE SCRIPTURE 1 THESSALONIANS 2:9-13

You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

¹⁰You are witnesses, and to God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers.

¹¹You know, we dealt with each of you like a father with his children,

¹²urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

¹³We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God’s word, which is also at work in you believers.

***GOSPEL SCRIPTURE MATTHEW 23:1-12**

Please read along in your Pew Bible, New Testament, page 25.

Feel free to read verses 11 and 12 of the passage out loud:

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; ³ therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.

⁴They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.

⁵They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.

⁶They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷and to be greeted with respect

in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi.

⁸But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students.

⁹And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—

the one in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah.

¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant.

¹²All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.