

Charles R. Blaisdell, Senior Pastor  
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All Saints Sunday  
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## For All the Saints: Loaves Abound

Isaiah 25:1, 6-10a O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.... On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. 7And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. 8Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. 9It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. 10 For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.

She was introduced to me as Mrs. Frances Kent. But very quickly she became “Frances” and then just “Fran.” The long-time members of her little Indiana country church spoke of her with love and affection as “Aunty Fran.” She had been there most of the century. She had taught the Sunday School classes for the elementary kids and now was teaching their children’s children, she had played the organ faithfully every Sunday, she had served as Moderator and Elder and Deacon and in every other way. She could often be found on Saturdays at the church getting ready for her class on Sunday morning. Sometimes she would buy something that the church needed out of her own small means, never telling anyone. On Christmas Eve she was at the church early to make sure it looked just-right. She was the one who made sure that all the mothers got plants on Mother’s Day and all the fathers got boutonnières on Father’s Day. She collected the Sunday School offering and kept the cradle roll.

But all of these things had become much harder for Aunty Fran when I first knew her when, while in seminary, I went to be the student pastor of that congregation. The small stroke she had suffered left her walk unsteady and her speech slurred. And sometimes she couldn’t be understood – and that brought tears of frustration to her eyes. Finally she was diagnosed with disease that quickly devastated her body and then the end came

mercifully quickly, but not so soon that she and I didn't have the chance to talk many times about life and faith. She shared both her trust and her fears, both her resentment at it all and her joy at a good life - a swirl of mixed thoughts and feelings. And even at the very end, her sense of humor had not deserted her; on our final hospital visit she asked me to bring her a skateboard next time so she could cruise the halls better. I helped bury Aunty Fran one cool October day amidst the blazing colors of an Indiana autumn, on a hillside overlooking the valley she'd loved. And I could agree with Isaiah: "*...the hand of the Lord rests upon this mountain.*"

He came to be the pastor of my congregation when I was a teenager – fourteen years old and full of myself. With his small stature and his prematurely white hair, I first feared that he would prove to be not much of a pastor. I wondered what in the world he would possibly have to say to me – I mean, he was an ancient relic over 50 years old! I soon discovered, though, something of this remarkable man's history. When virtually no other white pastor would welcome integration in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1956, Dr. Colbert Cartwright – or Bert, as he soon became known to all of us – was a force for the gospel, reminding his flock and the city (at some personal cost to himself and his family) that black and brown children are first of all children – period! – and that both the gospel and the Constitution call us to be color-blind. Some writers credit his leadership in Little Rock to sparing that city some of the scale of violence that other cities in the Deep South in that era experienced. Bert was also, I came to find out, one of the world's leading authorities on the music of – of all people – Bob Dylan. And Bert discovered that there was exactly one other person in the congregation who much cared about that fact – me. I discovered that Bert often came to his study at the church at night, to read, prepare his sermons, or pray. There were many evenings when I would ride my bike to the church, and Bert welcomed me and talked with me as if there were nothing more important in the world that he had to do than

talk to this teenager. Those conversations had a great deal to do with my finally accepting God's call to ministry; and all along the way, for the next 30 years, Bert was a guide and friend and pastor to me.

As it turned out, though, Bert did not get his father's long-life gene; his father had lived to be well over one hundred years of age. Bert, though, died 30 years short of that. And in his death he taught me and all those who loved him about accepting death as a part of life. He wrote a "healing service" that many of his close friends and family participated in just before he died – and it was a service that many still count as touching them deeply as they prayed together that even in death relationships with God and family and friends would always be healed and whole. And as I left the sanctuary of the church where Bert had pastored for so many years when we said our final goodbyes to him, and as I looked down from the little hill on which the church stands, I could truly say with Isaiah, indeed "*...the hand of the Lord rests upon this mountain.*"

Another story: He died in April of 2005, a remarkable man whose life was both triumph and tragedy, whose journey showed the best of America and the worst. Fred Korematsu was the American-born son of Japanese immigrants. In 1941 all those of Japanese ancestry on the west coast were rounded up with little more than 24 hours notice, told that they could take only the clothes on their back and what they could carry, had their homes and businesses confiscated, and were sent off to internment camps far, far from home. Fred Korematsu, active with his parents in their Oakland church, a quiet man but strong in his Christian faith, decided to oppose the order and he fled and hid. He was eventually captured and incarcerated first in a manure-filled horse stall, and then was sent to another camp further inland. But Fred continued to fight his own situation and that of those of his fellow Americans of Japanese ancestry. However, in the 1940s, his legal challenge ended at the Supreme Court, which affirmed that the internment of Japanese-

Americans was permissible.

For the next 50 years, Fred lived a quiet life, relishing his home, his family, and his church. But times were never easy; few employers would hire a convicted felon. But in the 1980s, friends helped re-open his case. And Fred, by all accounts one who shunned the limelight and derived deep contentment from his simple role as an usher at his congregation, was convinced that what had happened to him and 120,000<sup>1</sup> others was not right, did not represent the best of America and was not what God intended for a people where, as Paul would put it, there is to be neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. And by dint of quiet work, sustained by his faith and helped by his friends, Fred's conviction was finally overturned and President Reagan issued an apology for the internments of forty years earlier and President Clinton presented Fred with the Presidential Medal of Honor, comparing him to another driven to do right by her faith, Rosa Parks. The church was packed full on the day of Fred's funeral there in Oakland. And as I read the accounts of this funeral and of this courageous man's faith-driven life, I can't help but think: *"...the hand of the Lord rests upon this mountain."*

*"...The hand of the Lord rests upon this mountain."* On that mountain on this All Saints Sunday are indeed Aunt Franny and Fred and Bert. And on that mountain are also the ones we among this family have bid farewell to in the past year, names that are on the page in front of you, names that we have spoken aloud with both smiles of remembrance and tear-stained eyes. And what, we might ask, are they all doing on that mountain? Well, even as we ask the question, we must realize that there are many, many images in the Bible of what happens at death to the faithful: there is the image of a mansion with many rooms, of immortal souls, of perishable bodies putting on the imperishable, of everlasting arms, and

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<sup>1</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese\\_American\\_internment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_American_internment) See also <http://www.nps.gov/manz>

on and on. But none of these, of course, are literal; each of these is an attempt say with an **image** the great truth of the Gospel – that everyone is finally and always and forevermore safe and secure with God. November 1, All Saints Day – or the Sunday nearest it – has, since the 8<sup>th</sup> century, been the day on which the Church remembers and honors those who have indeed been among the company of the faithful, the saints, and who have died in the previous year. And thus we do so today, as we did last year. But today the prophet Isaiah offers us a **new** image to describe what this ultimate security with God is like: “...*the hand of the Lord rests upon this mountain.*” Why is that such a fitting and profound image? Well, I think the answer has to do with what is happening on that mountain. Did you hear what it is that they are all doing together on that mountain? It’s such an appropriate thing for our congregation: They’re **eating**. “*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.*”

Did you hear it? It’s not just junk food or MRE’s that the Lord provides on that mountain, but **great** food, **delicious** food, **rich and nourishing** food! For you see, to the original hearers of this passage from Isaiah this description of the foods would be evidence indeed to the Lord’s bounty and goodness, now and forever. Why? Well, because the Hebrew people had been in captivity in Babylon. They never had enough food to eat at all, much less “rich food.” They ate what they could and it was never quite enough. Nor did they have the luxury of letting their wine age; in a desert culture where water quality can be suspect, wine is a way of avoiding disease – but it means that when you don’t have enough wine you drink it when you can, grape skins and stems and everything, because you are thirsty and not to drink might mean to die. But **now**, now, on **this** mountain where the hand of the Lord rests, there is food, abundant food, rich food, food for all. It is no accident that virtually every culture associates food and funerals. As the old Italian saying goes, “Good food praises God” and that is true in life or in death. We don’t eat at funerals

because we're hungry, we eat because it is a sign and symbol that God provides, abundantly, now and even unto eternal life.

We often think of the celebration of communion as one of the things that links us with Christ's whole body of believers across the world. And it is indeed the sign that God's love through Christ is larger than anything that tries to divide the church, it is the reminder that God feeds everyone who calls upon the name of Christ even when we might find ourselves in profound disagreement with them. It is the sign and reminder to us that God's house and God's table is always, always wider, God's hospitality more encompassing, than we can know. But particularly on this All Saints Sunday we should also be reminded that this Table where we are fed, and all Christ's children are fed, links us not only with the living in every land, but the dead as well. Have you heard the phrase "the communion of the saints"? At this Table we are offered the opportunity to experience that phrase: the saints of God – that is, those who lived their lives knowing God's care and seeking to do God's will – crowd with us around this Table. Do you see them? Do you see them?

*"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear."*

We gather this morning in sight of our own mountain and we are presented with the feast of God. This is not just a sip of juice and a chunk of bread. No, it is the sign and surfeit of an overwhelming grace that sustains us in this life and forever. And we are not here alone today. Because Annie and Fred and Bert are here too. And so are Dorothy and Heather and Bill and Lamont and Helen and Winfield and Cindy and Betty and Letha and Bill and Glenn and Harry and Bob and Lorrene and Don and Max and Dorothy and Julie and Mary and Joe and Cruz and Pauline and Sam . Do you see them, crowded here around this Table? And they are here, too, with those ones you have named in your hearts and with your lips this day, being fed by God richly in eternal life as they were in earthly life. Do you

see them?

**[Pianist begins to play softly and slowly under the preacher “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ,” Chalice Hymnal, #422]**

*“For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.”* The hand of the Lord has spread this Table for all. The hand of the Lord feeds us, indeed, with the richest food. So even in the poignancy of our memories this morning, let us also be glad that this Table is so crowded with the saints. Let us be glad that we are richly fed. Let us be glad and let us use our tongues to sing and our talents to praise. On this All Saints Sunday, on this rich feast day of the Lord, let us indeed talents and tongues employ. For the loaves of God’s abundant grace indeed abound, loaves abound.

Let us stand and sing it! The words are printed in your bulletin.

**[Pianist increases volume and tempo; gives folks a chance to stand, and then plays intro the hymn for folks to sing]**