

93rd Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 25, 1999

Minister: Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

***Introit** O Come, Let Us Sing to the Lord

Greetings: Dr. Fred W. Bryant

Hymn: Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

Time with Children/Youth [children's lives in Central: school, chores, play, young boys helping around mines, celebrations: July 4th, Christmas, school programs, Grand Tournament competitions and parade]

***Anthem:** Just As I Am (Price/Besig)

Responsive Reading: Psalm 27

Hymn: All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name (Diadem)

Scripture Readings: Joshua 1:1-7, 2 Timothy: 1:1-14

Special Music: Since Jesus Came Into My Heart (McDaniel/Gabriel)
Pat Mitchell, Donna Koskiniemi, Pete Manderfield, Dan Rosemergy

Over My Head [Call to Prayer]

Pastoral Prayer & Remembrance: Hollace G. Roberts, 1909-1999
Thelma V. Sincock (1907-1999)

Announcements and Remarks: Dr. Fred W. Bryant

Offering and *Offertory Anthem: God, Give Us Peace (Sibelius)

Doxology

Sermon: **Risk, Courage, and Faith** (Abridged)

As I have re-read books about the settling of this area, I am impressed with how hard the life of the early miners and their families was, how uncertain, how filled with perils. The risks were great—sailing across the Atlantic, overland travel to Michigan, then north in small crafts to find hazardous work in mines. In *Cradle to Grave*, it's reported that 1,900 men were killed underground—falling, loose rock, accidental detonations, air blasts, collapsing timbers. These early settlers took great risks. Think of the courage it took of leave homeland, families, to come to this unknown land—and the faith that sustained them.

While our lives are certainly much different in many ways, we, too, face risks. We, too, struggle to find the courage to live lives that will be meaningful and reflect a sense of what it means to be children of God. We try to hang onto a faith that guides us in a rapidly changing world of high tech, globalization, and pluralism—and helps us get through the day to day crises of life.

We're going to reflect on all that today: to see what our faith tells us about living with risk, to view examples of courage, and to glimpse a faith for all times that grounds us yet moves us into the future

with confidence in a God who is ever present, who cares for us each day, and who calls us into joyful living in spite of hard times.

The Bible can be thought of as stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things, glimpses of the presence of God in everyday happenings, and promises of a new creation being lived out each day as we open ourselves to the truths of the eternal God—in joy, beauty, love, peace, justice, community—all leading to the creation of the *Shalom Community*. This is the background for our reflections on risk, courage, and faith, a setting not just for stories of the past but of our stories that we are living out today, and of the futures we are creating for our children and our world.

Scriptural Stories. The Bible is full of stories of risk, courage, and faith, in part because life itself is risky, but more importantly, because times of risk provide opportunities for making decisions about what is most important in life, what we value, what gives meaning and connects us with God.

Joshua. The Hebrew scripture told of God's commission to Joshua, following the death of Moses, to cross the Jordan into Canaan to take possession of the land promised to Israel following the Exodus (some 40 years before). After receiving the commandment from God, Moses sent spies into Canaan to report on the land and how risky conquering it would be. Only Joshua and Caleb believed that the Israelites could succeed with God's help. Only after the people who were afraid to go into Canaan were dead was entering the land again considered. Moses, now old, appointed Joshua to lead the people. Joshua was ready and still confident of God's presence—so with courage he led his people into Canaan, saying, "Be strong and courageous . . . God will not fail or forsake us." Great risk, great courage, great faith.

Timothy. Timothy was a follower of Jesus and a friend and helper of Paul, who had chosen him to help in Paul's second missionary journey. Paul sends Timothy words of encouragement in the face of the persecution of Christians. Paul writes, "God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control." He urges Timothy not to be afraid of testifying to their faith but to share in the suffering for the Gospel in the power of God. In 2 Corinthians, Paul summarizes what he has endured over the course of his ministry, so he is in a position to tell Timothy to take courage, "God will guard you in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus—guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us."

Have you noticed the shift? This is more than simply risk and courage. It's about faith—a faith entrusted to us that is worth sharing, taking risks for, confident that God will get us through, will give us courage to face whatever the suffering. In living purposefully, we find meaning; in taking risks, we find courage, we deepen our faith. Soren Kirkegaard wrote, "Without risk there is no faith, and the greater the risk, the greater the faith." Throughout the centuries, across the generations, risk, courage, and faith are at stake, despite different circumstances, different stories—but all about living with faith.

Central Mine. What did Joshua and Timothy have to do with the lives of the families who lived, worked, and worshipped here at Central, and with our lives today? Like us and our ancestors, they were attempting to discern God's will for their lives, and in a practical day to day way, to live meaningful lives, caring for family, earning a livelihood, building community, and living their faith. At times it was tough and dangerous. In *Calumet Copper and People*, Arthur W. Thurner writes, "Every miner, every family, lived constantly with the knowledge that sudden catastrophe underground was a possibility. An accident or fire in the mines could quickly end the promise of human happiness"—and he cites case after case. There are many accounts of the "fearful accident which occurred at the Central Mine, on the Lake Superior, on the 22nd of April 1872; by which ten miners lost their lives—eight from Cornwall and two

from Devonshire.” There’s a mining ballad from an unknown source that reveals more than a newspaper account does of the tragedy and the dangers of immigration:

Sad news from across the ocean we hear,
Sad news from the Central Mine,
Sad news for the wives and children dear,
Of death in that distant clime.

T’was ten o’clock on an April night,
When a change of men took place,
And thirteen miners in the skip – “all right,”
Down the shaft were lowered apace.

Ten men were on the top of the skip
And three seem’d safe within
When the wire-rope broke, with a sudden snap,
And it fell with an awful din.

And one by one they were soon brought up.
And laid in the change-house near,
Till coffins were made in which they were put
And sorrow and sighing were there.
And then to the grave on the first of
May, there proceeded a mournful train.

The echoes of the names of those lost or injured go on in the unwritten ballads of this land, some of them familiar to us who have been part of Central over the years.

On March 14, 1883, Edward Bryant (grandfather and great-grandfather of the Bryants with us today) lost his life while attempting to ride down with a load of timbers. The widow and children were permitted to live in the company-owned house rent free until the end of the month. No other compensation applied. [*The Bryants in Central*, Fred W. Bryant, Jr. M.D.]

In his journal, Alfred Nichols tells of his marriage to Eliza and the injury that changed his life: “Life and love smiled upon us until the day I received an injury in the mine . . . My left arm was badly fractured at the elbow and in order to prevent a stiff joint, they bound it tightly from my hand to my shoulder. After 30 hours, the bandage was removed and in a short time my arm was without feeling or muscular activity. From that day my forearm and hand were entirely useless and hung helplessly at my side. The question of compensation or liability was unknown. We accepted injury as an unfortunate experience and the consequent burden was personally assumed.”

These risks and dangers were a part of their lives, accepted with courage of who they were and pride in their work. The miners had a strong sense of integrity in providing for their families and doing their work well. They continued through hardships and dangers in and through their great spirit and faith. Their lives continued, families were raised, communities built, and churches provided solace and hope.

Jane Ivey Brant (wife of Edward), facing financial uncertainty, returned with her children to Cornwall but soon returned to Central and worked in sundry ways to support her family—confectionary with candies, millinery. The family prospered, “their lives entwined with the church, . . . theirs a simple, sustained faith with everyday applications.”

After a short period as a “dry man,” Alfred Nichols experienced discouragement and grief. He went to bed one night and prayed with all his heart. The next day, on a stage to Central Mine, he encountered a Cornishman who was “blind, had but one arm, and was lame. They shared tales of misfortune.” Finally, his travel companion said, “Well, my son, I don’t know you, have never seen you, but if I were as well off as you physically, I would ask for nothing more. My joys would be complete.” Nichols writes, “His words opened my eyes to new and greater vistas of life. I vowed I would never complain of my lot again as long as I lived. From my heart I uttered this prayer: Lord, where thou leadest me, I will follow.” He completed public school, entered Normal College (Ypsilanti, MI) and became a Central Mine school teacher and principal, and then 36 years as superintendent of schools of the Township of Osceola.

What stories. What risks, courage, and faith.

The final verses of the ballad:

Though their graves are made in a foreign land,
And their forms no more we shall see,
Yet we hope to meet on Canaan’s strand,
Each one with his family.

For when the last trump sounds thru the skies,
Each one shall appear again,
And may they and us with joy arise
The Savior to meet. Amen.

The risks of life—although different—continue for us. What of your courage? What of your faith?

Our Lives. We live with risk and danger. Some risks are simply being finite, organic beings who are subject to illness, accident, catastrophes, and death. Other risks are of our own making, either through choosing dangerous occupations or avocations. Risks also come from being a part of societies with violence. Our affluent lives are at risk as we strive to secure and protect position, possessions, investments. The litany could go on—but I don’t want to scare us to death. Risks are there. Bad things can and do happen from time to time.

In a *Peanuts* cartoon, Charlie Brown says to Linus, “I wonder why it happens. Just when you think everything is perfect, life deals you a blow!” Linus replies, “I know what you mean. Maybe we should all wear batting helmets.”

Do we have the strength to deal with life’s blows? Do we have the courage to work through the tough times? Is our faith strong enough to sustain us?

We have been talking about risk, courage, and faith. It is important to reverse the order: faith, courage, and risk. So a new order of questions: Does our faith center and ground us, shaping our view of life? Does that faith create a confidence that whatever happens we can deal with it, have the courage to get through it? Does our faith allow us to accept that life has risks but not allow those risks to cause us to hesitate to live our lives fully with zest and joy? Does our faith give us something to lean on?

In *May I Have This Dance*, author Joyce Rupp has a chapter, “Leaning on God” in which she recalls coming upon an old lean-to for sheltering animals on one of her hikes: “I could also see how we humans need our lean-tos in the storms of life which come upon us when our bodies are too weary to work, our spirits are too hurt to struggle, and our hearts are too pained to care. The journey of the human spirit

has tiring searches, long stretches of grief and letting go, dark-hearted things that steal the energy from our spirits. At these times we need lean-tos.” She reflects on lean-tos in her life. We have a wonderful lean-to in God whose heart always welcomes us and provides refuge for us. We often have people who stand by us and offer warmth, support, and refuge. Rupp writes, “We all need lean-tos; we all need to be lean-tos for others” --not permanent havens but temporary, essential shelters. She recalls that the Hebrew scriptures, especially the Psalms, are filled with images of God as an encircling shield, a shelter, a stronghold when times are difficult, a rock, a fortress, someone who revives our soul and girds us with strength.

It was that God who gave Joshua courage to face any risk. It was that God who gave refuge and strength to our ancestors here at Central. It’s that God who can be our lean-to for each of us in our world today. Rupp says that she learned much from the lean-tos in the life of Jesus, aware that he, too, needed shelter, refuge, and strength from life’s trials. It is Jesus’ example of faith and courage that inspired Paul and Timothy. It’s the spirit that sustained Central families and is available to us today. It’s more than lean-tos. It becomes a way of life.

With such trust in God, we can accept the risks inherent in our lives. We can weigh the risks involved in those things we choose to do, judging wisely, with a sense of living fully with purpose. We can be moved in faith beyond ourselves to a caring for family, friends, and community, and in faith to be willing to take risks that enhance the lives of all, for causes and purposes beyond ourselves. In an article, “Courage as the Heart of Faith,” Paul Jones writes, “Christian courage is the heart of faith experienced as trust.” We have talked about trust in the lives of Joshua, Timothy, Edward and Jane Bryant, Alfred Nichols—the importance of trusting in God. God doesn’t give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love.

Hymn: Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

Benediction, Response, Postlude

Organist: Mark Spreitzer

***Choir Members:** *Sopranos:* Sue Adams, Mary Henderson, Donna Koskiniemi, Pat Mitchell. Sharon Strieter

Altos: Carol Bard, Carolyn Martin, Carolyn Meyer, Connie Plymat, Theresa Rekowek

Tenors: Norman Everett, Peter Manderfield, Stanley Martin, Mark Spreitzer

Basses: Fred Bryant, Richard Hutchison, Gary Koskiniemi, Jack Porritt

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