

98th Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 25, 2004

Minister: Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

***Introit** New Every Morning

Greetings & Announcements: Joan Wake

A Moment of Remembrance and Thanksgiving: Harry J. Vine

Hymn: From All That Dwell Below the Skies

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

Time with Children/Youth [stories of Central women]

***Anthem:** How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place (Bruckner)

Responsive Reading: Luke 1:46-55 – Mary's Song of Praise

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

Scripture Readings: Proverbs 31:10-31; Luke 8:1-3; Romans 16:104

Special Music: We Are Dancing Sarah's Circle
Pat Mitchell, Donna Koskiniemi, Valerie Koskiniemi, Pete Manderfield, Dan
Rosemergy

I Love My God, Who Heard My Cry [Call to Prayer]

Pastoral Prayer

Offering and *Offertory Anthem: Thanks Be to Thee (Handel)

Doxology

Sermon: **The Women of Central: Faith, Work, and Love** (Abridged)

In *More Copper Country Tales*, Alfred Nichols shares memories of Sunday evening service here: "A single aisle divided the men from the women, as the sheep from the goats. On the right were the men, which was known as 'the men's side' . . . On the left sat the women, known as the 'the women's side.'" Ok, if all the men sitting on the women's side will move to where you're supposed to be, and the reverse, we can get on with a proper service! Well, thankfully, we've come a long way from those days in that regard, but it was revealing of the status and role of women in that time.

On the purpose of the law, Paul wrote, "For in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith . . . There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." That is the spirit of our faith—but it is a great sadness to me that it is still a distant vision. All too frequently faith and scripture have been misused to justify division, discrimination, inequality, and exclusivity—rather than building inclusive communities. For our theme this morning, that includes women, who have had to struggle for full and equal rights up to the present day. From early times, the roles of women have been defined by culture, religion, necessity, and division

of responsibilities within societies, leading to stereotypical roles. But women's roles mostly have been determined by men.

Women of Central (Keweenaw). Central Mine was organized in November 1854 and closed in July 1898. The Women's Rights Movement began in July 1848 with the Seneca Fall Convention in upstate New York. Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote the "Declaration of Sentiments" based on the Declaration of Independence. She wrote of the history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of men toward women, e.g., that married women were legally dead in the eyes of the law, women were not allowed to vote, married women had no property rights, most occupations were closed to women, no college would accept women.

The life of women here at Central was no different. Nichols writes, "It was generally understood that the rocking chair was not intended for daily or common use, and that if a good wife was known to indulge in that luxury, it was regarded as an unquestionable sign of neglected household duties. The daughter in the house knew how to wash, knit, scrub, and iron. Reading or 'fancy work' was discouraged entirely, both being regarded as a waste of time and better if she was mending stockings" (pp. 62-63).

While the women of Central had limited legal rights and narrowly defined roles, they had important responsibilities in the home, community, and church. They showed remarkable spirit, endurance, and determination, and an ability not only to survive but to thrive.

Women in the Bible. Religion has a great deal to do with many understandings about women, and that history has both positives and negatives, in part determined by the social and cultural settings of the time. It is our responsibility as people of faith to be clear about what we believe and why, and to be clear about the implications of what we believe for our own and others' lives. The scripture readings we heard this morning both reflect the times in which they were written, but, if read carefully, reveal the movement toward full respect and inclusion of women in our communities of faith and society. In the New Testament, patriarchal roles continued yet "all are subject to one another in Christ." Women were among Jesus' followers, and women were prominent in the early church (Romans).

Proverbs. This hymn in praise of a "capable wife" had a catalog of her heroic deeds. She manifests a vital joy in doing good.

Luke. This passage opens with references to groups who followed Jesus--the twelve disciples, a group of women, and his mother and brothers. This is the only reference in any of the gospels of women following during Jesus' Galilean ministry and serves as a corrective to the assumption that all Jesus' followers were men.

Romans (1 Cor. 14:33-36). First, let's address the misconception that Paul said that women should keep silent in the church, often used by denominations to prohibit women's ordination or leadership in the institutional church. Biblical scholarship suggests that this was later added by editors of the manuscript. No other passage suggests any limitation on the role or functions of women in the Pauline church; in fact, our known writings by Paul are to the contrary. In the verses we heard, Paul was careful to greet all with equal enthusiasm. The first person he commends is Phoebe, a business woman and leader of the church. He requests her help. She has been a benefactor to many, including Paul. She was a "sister in the Lord." There are Priscilla and Aquilla known from Acts and 1 Cor., among Paul's closest friends. Their home is among the first of the early house churches.

All of these scriptures reflect the practices of their time, yet open us to new understandings in faith. They can be viewed collectively as part of a movement toward a more complete embodiment of God's inclusive love. Each reflects their present but gives a glimpse of the future in God's love.

Women of Central: Faith, Work, Love. So, too, the stories of the women of Central are a part of the evolution of women's roles, respecting the past and present but striving for new possibilities in the future.

Faith. In *Beyond the Boundaries*, Larry Lankton writes, "Women in the Keweenaw had fewer opportunities than men to mingle together outside the house and to join organizations. They wrote in their diaries of loneliness and their yearning for female companionship. When churches were built, women had a safe, respectable place to go and meet in groups, enjoy one another's company, and engage in cooperative, useful, and entertaining activities. In lieu of giving sermons, women of the church gave socials and benefits. They organized charities and church picnics" (p. 135). At a deeper level, I think that faith sustained these women through separation from husbands, the hardships of life in this rugged place, accidents and illness, loneliness. In faith, they celebrated the birth of children, baptisms, weddings, Christmas and other holidays. In faith, they turned to the church.

A Central tribute to the Kingston family reads, "Social life revolved around the Methodist Church, and this meant much to Hanna. Members signed a register every Sunday. Her name was always near the top, a dedicated, punctual member."

Work. We've talked about the many household chores women had, seemingly unending. One could multiply that for the women who ran boarding houses, "the boardin' missions." In *Long Winter Ends* (Newton Thomas), Jim Holman, who had to leave his wife Pol in Cornwall, stayed at a boarding house in Allouez. Jim describes her "doin's"—"She was loading all the pails for the men who went to work that night (each a different favorite lunch) . . . That job done, she took a shawl off the wall and went to the hydrant for water and then fetch two armfuls of wood for the stove." She cooked for how many he did not know, and cleaned and scrubbed.

In a wonderful moment at the end of a night shift, Sammy and Dick are taking a rest. Nichols describes this conversation about Sammy's intended. Dick says, in approval, "Her mother is one of the best women in all of Central. Her husband's diggen clothes es washed and mended every week. His crib [lunch] es always wholesome and cooked well, and you never saw him carry a rusty, smooty dinner can in all yer life. . . . The girl es the image of her mother in everything, and with the trainen she has had es bound to make wan of the 'finest women'" (p. 36, *More Copper Country Tales*). There is something warm and wonderful about that conversation and the sense of mother/daughter relationships in the bringing up of "fine women."

Love. Faith and work are connected and completed by love. There was a great deal of love in Central women—for husband, children, home, community, church. It is a love that cannot be measured, that moves one beyond present realities. It reaches out, gives meaning, makes life bearable, sustains and gives hope.

In *Long Winter Ends*, there is a moving episode in which Jim is watching Mrs. Jenkins, who runs the boarding house, sewing. She teared up talking about her family home in Cornwall. She said, "Hi be 'appy t'be with 'Arry but I do miss 'ome.' Jim was silent. That a woman should be happy with her man had been the whole of Jim's philosophy. The idea came to him with a shock, that a woman might want more than that." (p. 274).

The Women's Rights Movement and Issues Today. I'm sure many men did not open themselves to the possibility that women might want more. This kind of limited sensitivity to others all too often closes off new possibilities—but women didn't let that stop them.

In *Long Winter Ends*, there's a wonderful exchange at the Boarding House between newly arrived Cousin Jacks and Mrs. Bond, "the boarding missus," a widow. She describes the company housing, all the same, regardless of individual family needs. She says, "'What you do when you come here is one thing; what you do when you stay is another. As a stopping place this sort of thing will pass, but as a place to stay in it is an outrage.' They were mute. This was new. A woman hushing them, defying them, answering back! . . . Their place of power had slipped away from them, was in the keep of a woman!" (p. 171).

Over the past seven generations, dramatic social and legal changes have been accomplished—in family life, religion, government, employment, education—but those changes did not happen spontaneously. Women themselves made these changes happen to create a better world, and they have had considerable success.

Whatever choices we make for our own lives, most of us envision a world for our daughters, nieces, and granddaughters where all girls and women will have the opportunity to develop their unique skills and talents and pursue their dreams. The National Women's History project concludes, "Women and girls today are living the legacy of women's rights that seven generations of women before us have given their best to achieve. Alice Paul, the organizer who first wrote out the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923, said, "I always feel the movement is sort of a mosaic. Each of us puts in one little stone, and then you get a great mosaic at the end." That goes for men, too. We need to put in some stones. I look forward to seeing the completed mosaic. Then, along with the Apostle Paul, we can say, "We are all one in the spirit of Christ." May it be so!

Hymn: Faith of our Fathers (Mothers)

Benediction, Response (God Be with You Until We Meet Again), **Postlude**

Organist: Susan Rokicki

***Choir Members:** *Sopranos:* Carol Bard, Joanne Bollinger, Tacy Flint, Donna Koskiniemi, Valerie Koskiniemi, Pat Mitchell, Sharon Streiter

Altos: Glenna Irwin, Connie Martin, Marcia Mason, Carolyn Meyer, Deanna Martin

Tenors: Jim Irwin, Peter Manderfield, Stanley Martin, Ramsey Meyer, Tom Westlake

Basses: Fred Bryant, Gary Koskiniemi, Jay Martin, Graham Meyer, Jack Porritt

Page Turner: Debbie Manderfield

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