

**86th Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 26, 1992**

**Minister:** Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

**Organ Preludes** Donald M. Ross

**\*Introit:** Glory Be to the Father (R. Vaughn Williams)

**Greetings:** Dr. Fred W. Bryant

**Hymn:** A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

**Invocation and Lord's Prayer**

**\*Anthem:** Thou Lord Are Worthy (F. J. Haydyn)

**Responsive Reading:** Psalm 137: 1-6; 138

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

**Scripture Readings:** Exodus 15:22-27, Acts 7:30-38, Luke 4:1-13

**Pastoral Prayer & In Remembrance:** Ruby Rosemergy Stetter (1895-1992)  
Violet Christianson Shimonek (1908-1992)  
Irene Hocking Nicholls (1900-1991)

**Announcements and Remarks:** Dr. Fred W. Bryant

**Offering and\*Offertory Anthem:** O Jesus, Grant Me Hope and Comfort (J. W. Franck)

**Doxology**

**Sermon:** **Encountering God in the Wilderness** (Abridged)

We return this special weekend to remember and to celebrate, never really having left in spirit. Time blurs, as we become one with past generations and a part of the continuing reality of Central for ourselves and future generations.

Alfred Nichols, former resident [of Central Mine] and one of the founders of this Reunion, did much to make it a living memory. In the preface to *More Copper Country Tales*, E. M. Laitala wrote, "What kind of people were they, and where did they come from? *How in the world could they live in this wilderness?* . . . The people who came here . . . *brought life to the stillness of the wilderness.*" It is their story, it is our story, and it is a central and ongoing part of our own faith story. We all travel through the wilderness—finding God and ourselves—and, when we're successful, bringing life to our own wilderness.

*Let us pray:* O God, we are moved by the beauty of this place—

--a wilderness out of which community grew

--a wilderness that was transformed by the hard work and determination of those who lived and died here

--a wilderness in which a flower still grows here and there to show where they were

--a wilderness that draws each of us together today

--a wilderness filled with the presence of God offering new life and hope to all

Guide us, O God, as you guided the residents of this wilderness as we live in our own wildernesses.  
Amen.

Have you ever been in the wilderness? I know you're saying, Oh, oh, a quiz—I knew I shouldn't have come. What in the world is a wilderness experience? First off, any wilderness will do.

Charles Stetter will recall the first wilderness experience that came to my mind. Many years ago, he and I set out to walk from one of the logging roads near Mandan through the cedar woods/swamp to the Eastern side of the Keweenaw Peninsula. Now, that's wilderness—heavy woods, fallen trees, underbrush, and it was raining. We were soaked through when we finally got through it and decided with some trepidation to stay overnight in an illegal hunting camp, hoping that in the bad weather no one would return. It gave us a sense of the kind of wilderness the early settlers in this area found.

Today's scripture readings focus our attention on other wildernesses that are so much a part of our faith history—the wilderness around Mt. Sinai where Moses was called by God to return to Egypt to lead his people out of slavery. Then, following the Exodus, the 40-year testing of Israel in the wilderness. And in the Gospel reading, the account of Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan.

Each of these wilderness experiences are central to our faith understandings. Those who are involved find themselves in strange places and feel alone. They are times of testing, of being required to make choices that define who and what we are. In all these stories, there is an encounter with God.

The settlers here came to a wilderness in all these ways. This was a vast and unsettled place. They felt loneliness, homesickness. It was a time of testing and deciding what was most important to them and their families. And central to all their stories was an encounter with their God through faith that sustained them.

*The Long Winter Ends* (by Newton G. Thomas) is the story of a Cornwall mine closing and the difficult decisions for the out-of-work miners. Jim, his brother Jake, and three others decide to find work in the copper mines of Northern Michigan. Jim had to leave Pol, his pregnant wife, behind. After the long trip, they found work at the Allouez mine. They were torn between the opportunities here in the Keweenaw and the pull of Cornwall.

INTO THE WILDERNESS. I want to interweave episodes from *The Long Winter Ends* with our faith stories because it's the same story—just different times, places, and people. It's the shared story of all humankind—of finding meaning within the realities of our day-to-day existence, of finding God in the midst of it all, and letting ourselves be sustained and led in God's love—even in our wilderness places.

*The Place*. The story from Exodus occurred just after the Israelites fled across the Red Sea. They stopped to celebrate their escape, but Moses ordered them to move on into the wilderness of Shur. For 3 days in the wilderness, they found no water. How long would they wander in this desert? Moses cried out to God—who showed him a piece of wood to throw into the water, and the water became sweet. This was a sign that God was with them and would provide for them. They were put to the test—they would be in the wilderness for 40 years. God said, "I am the God who heals you."

After 4 weeks journey, Jim and his companions stood on the platform of the little train station at L'Anse looking across at their wilderness, not knowing what the future held. Would they find work? Where would they live? Would Jim see his wife and child again? The forest ranged as far as they could see. At Allouez, Capt. Chenoweth offered them jobs. On the first Sunday, they went to chapel and sang a familiar

hymn—“and the singing gave them a heart’s ease....They were at home; strangeness had gone . . . .” And in the singing—God’s voice.

*The Feeling/The Test.* In Acts, Stephen rehearses the faith story of the Israelites, including the voice of God in the burning bush sending Moses to rescue the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. This testing of Moses, this call in the wilderness, renewed his involvement with his people, of building with them a new life in covenant with their God. Moses went in spite of his uncertainties.

In a similar way, Jim had to face new circumstances and make a decision. After a long night shift, Jim and his friends sat talking in the boarding house. He puzzled over his sense of oddity, a newness, of isolation. He sensed he was accepted, but he also sensed his separateness. As he thought of Cornwall, he realized that wherever he went, he was part of the whole, and all that surrounded him was a part of him. Jim found himself, his place, his future, in this wilderness.

*The Time/The Encounter with God.* We’re all familiar with the Gospel story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness following his baptism. He was led out by the Spirit and spent 40 days there. For me, the most important part of this story is Jesus going away alone—of looking within himself to decide what was most important and to struggle with the meaning of his own life and ministry—and feeling the Spirit’s constant presence with him.

Jim, too, was sustained by his faith and often turned to God and felt the Spirit’s presence. In one passage, he and his partner walked to their place from the bottom of the shaft, loath to disturb the stillness that had settled in. They were alone, and the spell of the place, its cathedral quiet, hushed them. “A profound, unanalyzed respect for the Spirit . . . had come upon them” (p. 96). At another time, Jim pondered a conversation with Allen, who “made religion a thing of the open fields, the woods, the seasons, a thing to which a house, a ceremony, a bell were not essential. Religion was a garment of happiness to wrap around duty, justice, and honor” (p. 110).

They all encountered God in the wilderness. Have we?

*Encountering God.* The wilderness experience as a place is less and less common, in part because such places are fewer and most of us do not take the time to get away to wilderness places for retreat and renewal. The wilderness experience may be what we leave behind. Our habitual pursuits and ordinary occurrences of life are often the very things that create wilderness experiences that test us—a crisis, a moral dilemma, an illness, a job loss—or wilderness experiences that confront us on a societal basis, e.g., environmental crisis, war/conflict, poverty. These events push us to decide what is most important in life—what we commit ourselves to—and to decide what grounds us, what we hang onto, what sustains, lifts us.

The wilderness has always been a place to go away to—to listen for God’s voice. Hosea: “I will entice you into the desert and there I will speak to you in the depths of your heart.” Henri Nouwen, in the tradition of the Desert Fathers, writes, “The spiritual life starts at the place where you can hear God’s voice. Where somehow you can claim that long before [anyone] touched you, loved you, and wounded you—long before that, you were held safe in an eternal embrace. You were seen with eyes perfect with love long before you entered into the dark valley of life. . . .” We must open ourselves to recognize “holy ground.”

On the final shift when the Holmebush Mine closed, the group from the 18<sup>th</sup> level sang anyway, as they were accustomed to doing. Suddenly, breaking the silence, came a familiar song from below; it grew into

a moderato and then to full strength. When silence returned, a listener said, "The Diadem is a brave tune." [Contemporary Reading: Alfred Nichols, *More Copper Country Tales*, pp. 31-32]

**Hymn:** Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing

**Benediction, Response, and Postlude**

**Organist:** Donald M. Ross

**\*Choir Members:** *Sopranos:* Carol Bard, Mary Henderson, Pearl Jalkanen, Betty Martin, Deanna Martin, Pat Mitchell, Esther Rosemergy

*Altos:* Sue Adams, Flora Graham, Carolyn Meyer, Connie Plymat

*Tenors:* Peter Manderfield, Stanley Martin, Mark Spreitzer

*Basses:* Dr. Fred Bryant, Jay Martin, Jack Porritt, Jack Trudgeon, Harry Vine

**Executive Committee Members:** Dr. Fred W. Bryant, Gary A. Bryant, Robert J. Bryant, James K. Curto, Jeffrey Nicholls Curto, David C. Heikka, Hollace G. Roberts, Silas C. Rosemergy, Donald M. Ross, R. Charles Stetter, David H. Thomas, Harry J. Vine, Dr. Brian D. Wake, John E. Wilson

**In Recognition:** Golden Wedding Anniversary of Betty and Stan Martin on June 13, 1992