

92nd Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 26, 1998

Minister: Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

Organ Preludes: Donald M. Ross

***Introit**

Greetings: David H. Thomas

Hymn: Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

Time with Children/Youth [Creation story...a beautiful earth to provide for us, including minerals of the earth; this area blessed with abundant copper; copper samples]

***Anthem:** The Lord Is My Light (Allitsen)

Responsive Reading: John 4:7-21

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

Scripture Readings: Micah 6:6-8, Luke 10:25-28

Special Music: I'm Pressing on the Upward Way (Higher Ground)
Pat Mitchell, Donna Koskiniemi, Gary Koskiniemi, Dan Rosemergy

Pastoral Prayer & Remembrance: Robert (Bob) J. Bryant
William Keith Liddicoat
John Paton Sincock

Announcements and Remarks: David H. Thomas

Offering and *Offertory Anthem: Come, Holy Ghost (Thiman)

Doxology

Sermon: **An Old Time Religion for Our Time** (Abridged)

The wilderness into which these early settlers came to make a life was hard. They needed faith and hope in order to go on. Many of the miners were Cornish (although people of numerous nationalities and faiths came) and they brought Methodism with them. In *The Wesleys of Cornwall*, the author John Pence writes:

Thousands of Cornish men and women have sailed from the little ports and hards of Cornwall, setting their faces towards every part of the world where metal was to be found. Much has been written of their prowess in mining and engineering and it would perhaps be difficult to exaggerate the significance of their genius and inherited skills. But theirs was not a mere industrial contribution to the wealth of the new lands. They were, many of them, the spiritual children of Wesley; they were his living memorials and they took to new and developing communities the spiritual treasures that they had received at his hands. 'A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid'; their lives were more telling than their work.

I want to talk this morning of that spirit—that old-time religion. As I read or re-read books in my library about the early mining communities in this area, I was struck by how much their religion was a part of their lives—of who they were, of what gave meaning to their lives. I don't want to idealize their religious faith. The miners were not all saints; in fact, many lived rough, colorful lives. Nor do I want to suggest that their faith understandings are ones I would necessarily agree with. But there were dimensions of their religion and ways in which many lived their faith that we need in our time.

Even on the surface, their religion was more a part of their lives than it is for most of us today. For example, frequency of attendance—Sunday classes, societies, worship, choir, prayer meetings. The church was the center of community activity. The activities, worship, and sermons were topics of daily conversation and heated discussion. And at a deeper level, there was an almost constant awareness of the sacred—in nature, underground in the mines, during crisis, in times of loneliness. Many turned to their faith and were sustained by prayer and song, and were cared for by their community. It was *real*. In *Long Winter's Night*, Jim tells of his last chapel service before leaving Cornwall for America—the sermon, the songs, the sharing: “He couldn't make it clear . . . give it a shape, call it by name. The only thing he was sure of was that something was real” (p. 28).

That old-time religion has a great deal to say to us today when religion is all too often separated from our daily lives. It is an afterthought, an hour on Sunday with little if any relationship to our lives on Monday. We live in a time when there is societal confusion about the role of religion (e.g., in education, public sphere, politics, national identity). There is a major membership decline in the mainline (old line) church, with denominations struggling to reverse the trend, trying to discover why people are leaving the church.

In the early 90s, Gallup surveys showed that church/unchurched groups felt that churches generally are not helping people deal with religious doubts or spiritual needs. So what is it we're looking for in religion?

Religion that's skin-deep. Gallup surveys reflect that levels of religious belief and practice in the U.S. are extraordinarily high, e.g., believe in a personal God, believe prayers are answered. People say that religion is either “very” or “fairly important” in their lives. In fact, only 4% of Americans say they are totally non-religious. The paradox is that while there are high levels of religious belief, we live in a nation where many are homeless or impoverished, where broken families are common, where morals and ethics are declining. The Gallup analysis is:

At times it appears that our religion is only skin deep and we are a nation of asserters rather than believers. Indeed, church involvement alone does not seem to make a great deal of difference in the way we live our lives. The churched are just as likely as the unchurched, for example, to engage in unethical behavior. While religion is highly popular, survey evidence suggests that it does not change people's lives.

Further, the surveys suggest a knowledge gap. Most who profess religious belief have little concrete knowledge of even the most basic tenets of faith, or of their scriptures or doctrines. The poll further finds a “work gap.” Most view their faith as a personal matter to be aided but not necessarily influenced by the churches to which they belong. It is a kind of consumer approach to religion where the key value is getting one's own needs met. The report concludes, “We pick and choose beliefs and practices that are most comfortable and least demanding. It is religion à la carte.”

It is only at the level of deep religious commitment where we find extraordinary differences in outlook, charitable activity, happiness, and in other ways. The “hidden saints” account for only about 10% of the

population. An encouraging note—there are two undercurrents: (1) an intensive search for meaning (rejection of materialism, shallowness of modern life), (2) an intensified search for meaningful relationships arising out of loneliness and lack of community.

A real religion. Not all churches or all people of faith have “lost” real religion. Many churches are deeply committed to renewal and transformation. Many are giving the concerns I’ve raised innovative, inspired thought. In *Reclaiming the Church: Where the Mainline Church Went Wrong and What to Do About It*, John Cobb suggests that a vital church (1) is culturally engaged in social problems, (2) will respond to how the larger society challenges faith, and (3) theological thinking itself is a sign of vitality, not just renewal but transformation.

Scripture. I selected two scriptures that best capture my sense of a real religion. *Micah 6:6-8*—What is good? To do justice, to love kindness, and to talk humbly with your God. *Luke 10:25-28*—What must I do to inherit eternal life? Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, strength, and might. Love your neighbor as yourself. What would you pick as scripture to express your sense of religion? For me these passages of scripture capture “real religion.” They guide us to finding a faith centered in God and love.

These guideposts were there for the early settlers, and they are there for us. It’s a matter of recognizing them, making them our own. They speak to us of a religion that is old and new, and thus it is an old religion for our time. It is a guidepost for us individually, for our society. It is a religion that is: LIVING—makes a difference on how we live each day. LOVING—makes us move beyond ourselves to others, to community. LASTING—grounds, sustains us over time. It is, down deep, a religion of the heart.

This old-time religion starts with our openness to God’s constant presence. God not only created but is creating still in our lives every day and can be found in daily living, in our experiences and relationships. There’s a wonderful passage in *Long Winter’s Night* where Jim has come to respect a miner friend Allen who had moved beyond the form of religion to a lived religion: “He made religion a thing of the open fields, the woods, the seasons, a thing to which a house, a ceremony, bells were not essential. Religion was a garment of happiness to wrap about duty, justice, honor.”

In *Weavings* (Sept-Oct 1996), Stephen Doughty writes, “What I hear is a soft, steady call to enter more fully the place where God stirs up love. . . . We are called to give ourselves to such places, and to receive with wonder what God offers in the midst of them. Only then will we discover most fully what we, together, are to be about.”

Rollin Russell [Conference Minister, Southern Conference U.C.C.] captures this view of real religion: “We must live according to the teachings we profess. We are called to be servant people, peacemakers who hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice. We are disciples of Christ and members of a covenant community who are ‘in the world’ but ‘not of it.’ We are therefore responsible to discern what is good and true, to speak the truth in love, and to thus be the people God intends.” May it be so.

Hymn: Jesus I have Promised

Benediction, Response, Postlude

Organist: Donald M. Ross

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

Altos: Deanna Martin, Carolyn Martin, Carolyn Meyer, Connie Plymat

Tenors: Norman Everett, Gary Koskiniemi, Stanley Martin, Mark Spreitzer

Basses: Fred Bryant, Richard Hutchison, Jay Martin, Graham Meyer, Jack Porritt

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