

109th Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 26, 2015

Minister: Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

Organ Prelude Father Corbin Eddy

Greetings & Announcements: David H. Thomas

***Introit** From All That Dwell Below the Skies (Watts/Hatton)

Call to Worship

Hymn: Praise to the Lord

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

A Time with Children/Youth [Story of St. Piran and the Cornish Flag, gave children a Cornish Flag, copper, and currant cookies]

***Anthem:** God Is Our Refuge (Allen Pote)

Responsive Reading: 11th Sunday First Reading – Beatitudes

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

Scripture Readings: Psalm 37:3-7a Take Delight in God
Micah 6:6-8 What Is Good
Mark 12:28-33 The Great Commandment

Special Music: Precious Memories (Wright & Combs)
Carolyn Meyer, Connie Martin, Pete Manderfield, Dan Rosemergy

Pastoral Prayer and Moment of Remembrance: Alfred Nichols, 1861-1944

Offering and *Offertory Anthem: Offertory (John Ness Beck)

Doxology

Sermon: **Life Itself: A Two-Way Gift** (Abridged)

Today, our Remembrance was of Alfred Nichols, who conceived the idea of this annual Central Mine Reunion, or Homecoming. We carry on that tradition with joy and thanksgiving as we remember, celebrate, and reflect on our own lives and faith. For me, my "lived memories" of Central go back to my childhood; and now, in my 28th year as minister of these services, I continue to be renewed, connected to my roots, and lifted in spirit for my living now.

Last year our service theme was "Life Together," during which we reflected on our "life circles"—families, neighborhoods, communities, congregations, nation, and world. I asked: How are we doing in getting along with one another and in creating loving, vital, just, and peaceful communities? Following that Reunion, I read an article by the Rev. Dr. Ann Parker (professor of theology and writer), who wrote, "This is one thing our faith is sure of: there is a spark of sacredness in every living being. When life faces life within the circle of community, we can see the center that is 'God' present in our solidarity." This moved me to consider the giftedness of each life and the call of our faith to live our sacred life to the fullest. The

way we each live our life—our individual sacredness—makes a difference in the vitality and strength of our communities.

Are you living fully your sacredness, so that when you join hands with others you bring the fullness of your life? I am reminded of a Danish proverb: “What you are is God’s gift to you. What you do with yourself is your gift to God.” How are *you* doing? How are *we* doing? I’ve pondered that this past year. What am I doing with the amazing and awesome gift of life that has been given to me? Is the way I live a gift to myself, to others, and ultimately to God? *Life is really a two-way gift*—if we live it with gratitude and commitment to living fully each day.

The Challenge. Think for a moment about our individual lives, how we live each day, what’s happening in and around us, how we are dealing with it all. Are we living fully and making the most of each day? Do we sense the sacredness of our lives? Is there a time each day to connect with God and the sacred, to feel God’s presence wherever we are and in whatever we’re doing? It’s challenging, with the daily demands, the realities of life—family responsibilities, job demands, setbacks, illness, loss, separation, loneliness—you know the litany. Often, we don’t think we have the time to step back and reflect on how we might live more fully.

At times, life can be discouraging. It’s often hard to be hopeful. We can identify with *Peanuts’* Charlie Brown. Charlie Brown and Lucy are walking along. Lucy says, “Think about this day for a moment, Charlie Brown. This could very well be the most important day of your life! When a day begins, you never really know what is going to happen.” He considers this and replies, “You’re right, Lucy, and this very ordinary day could turn out to be the most important day of my life! -- But it probably won’t!”

We try to live better lives, and there are many reminders that we can do better. The top 10 *New Year resolutions* are: (1) become stress free, (2) lose weight, (3) increase education, (4) quit smoking, (5) save money (6) to not have a New Year’s resolution, (7) eat healthier, (8) read more books, (9) take a trip, (10) solve relationship problems. There are *self-help books*; among the top 20 is *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho on the essential wisdom of listening to our hearts, learning to read the signs along life’s path, and following our dreams. The association of *motivational speakers* has 4,000+ members with an average fee of \$20,000 but many over \$300,000--\$500,00 presenting on life improvement, health and well-being, business, contemporary issues, global concerns. The Federation of *Life Coaches* has 12,000 members. Add to all this, therapists, counselors, internet websites. I don’t disparage any of these. They can be helpful, but there needs to be something deeper, centering in each life. We need to find our real selves, not the selves defined by others and society. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you into something else is the greatest accomplishment.”

Another Way. In 2014, I urged us to become faithful and faith-filled people. That is different for each of us, but needs to be grounded in gratitude for our lives, centered in love, and committed to joining hands and hearts with others. There needs to be an openness to the sacred around us, and an awareness of our deep yearning to continue to grow in all dimensions of our lives, physically, emotionally, spiritually. I wrote this—read it—and said *what?* I’ll try to explain.

Biblical Passages—Sacredness of Life. The sacred writings of our faith (and other faiths) give us glimpses into the meaning of life and insight into how we might live more fully.

Psalms 37:3-7a. Here we’re called to live by faith and what is inseparable from faith: hope. We have hope because God is our creator and sustainer of life. There is assurance that God’s provisions for life can be trusted.

Micah 6:6-8. Here we are reminded of all that God has done for us. The question is asked: What does God expect of us? The question is turned on us. God is more interested in the way we live our lives everyday and calls us *to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.*

Mark 12:28-34. This is a summary of the law—love God and love your neighbor.

It becomes clear that the way we live our individuals lives in love leads to reaching out to others, joining hands and hearts.

Central Life Lessons. Think of the miners and families who came here, who took the long, harrowing journey, settling in this wilderness, hoping to find work in order to support their families. They came with determination to make it and with their faith to sustain them. The story of Alfred Nichols is inspiring to recall. He overcame his mining injury and changed the course of his life through education, going on to teach and to lead education here in the Keweenaw. He helped build community, lived by faith, and found joy in the church's music. At one point in his career he referenced the scripture so "fully expressive of [his] heart: 'The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.'"

So many stories of Central speak to the ongoing efforts to live better lives. The church was valued not just for Sunday services but also for classes, prayer meetings, choir, and more. Societies were formed to further the spiritual and religious welfare of its members. One was led by John Trenear and Silas Polmear. The society met weekly, suggested topics for mutual consideration, asked members how their souls prospered, and offered words of helpfulness and comfort to "the weak and spiritually distressed." The everyday lives of everyone in the community mattered, and folks were here to help, based on faith, a deep commitment to love and care, and appreciation of the value of living in community.

Our Contemporary Lives. Let's recall the proverb: "What you are is God's gift to you. What you do with yourself is your gift to God." How are *you* doing? How are *we* doing? Is the life you live fully using your gifts and abilities so that you can bring all of that to the communities (circles) of which you are part? And that includes family, friends, congregations, neighborhoods, and our wider communities. For me, at least three things ground my life and spiritual growth: (a) opening myself to the continuing presence of God as spirit of love, sensing the sacredness of life; (b) recognizing that same sacred presence in others; and (c) experiencing joy in our sacred life together. ("Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God"— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin)

Continuing Presence of God. Recall Parker's affirmation, "There is a spark of sacredness in every living being." That is a fundamental truth of my life, one that I/we need to be aware of and open to in each moment of our lives. Where and how do we sense the sacred in our lives? We need to get in touch with that. We're moved by moments of beauty, sounds of an orchestra, loving relationships, passages of poetry. These are moments when we can sense the sacred. Some would say that God is found in unexpected places.

For me, God is always present in ongoing creation and the unfolding of our lives and world; God is a creative life force luring us toward love, beauty, peace, justice, and new life. It's not a matter of God suddenly showing up in unexpected places, but rather realizing that God is always present. It's just up to us to open ourselves to that presence. From the time I was a boy, I experienced God in the beauty of Lake Superior's shores, my family's love, hearing my dad play the violin as I fell asleep, experiencing the faith and love of the Laurium UMC, singing in the choir, these Central Reunions, being affirmed by our wider community. I've never lost that deep faith in God's presence. I love the words by Robert Brizee in "Where in the World Is God?": "I think of God as constantly present with me, not as one who intervenes

once and a while. I may feel alone, but I do not think of myself as alone. I know God is in the tiny and ordinary events of my daily living, not just at the major crossroads . . . I hear God inviting me to be co-creator to enrich the world.”

Sacred Presence in Others. As we become aware that our life is a sacred gift, we must respect the sacred in others. St. Augustine wrote, “There is no holiness to be ascertained apart from the holiness that can be glimpsed in one another’s eyes.” Our sacred circle draws us together in a passionate love of life. At times this is easy. But there also are folks who are mean spirited and destructive of the circle of life. It can be hard to sense the sacred in them. Nevertheless, “We covenant / to be invitational / to be accepting / to speak grace-filled truth / to forgive each other / over and over again. / And yes, / to love” (“We Covenant,” Janice Marie Johnson, from *Bless the Imperfect*). These are wise, loving words.

Joy of Our Sacred Life. As we strive to live fully, to recognize the sacredness of each life, we must sense and live the joy of our living as sacred beings, “holy, beloved children of God.” For me, that joy is captured in Ann Weems’ “Balloons Belong in Church,” which is why I love and appreciate the balloons that Debbie and Peter Manderfield bring each Reunion service. Weems writes, “Bring your balloons and your butterflies, your bouquets of flowers / . . . / Life is a celebration, an affirmation of God’s love.” Feel the joy. Sense the love. May it be so!

Hymn: Take My Life and Let It Be

Benediction

Response: God Be With You Til We Meet Again

Organist: Father Corbin Eddy

Choir Director: Carolyn Martin Meyer

***Choir Members:** *Sopranos:* Carole Bard, Sara Locatelli, Charlene Marculis, Nancy Molloy

Altos: Joanne Bollinger, Hilary Duwe, Connie Martin, Lani Poynter

Tenors: Peter Manderfield, Ramsey Meyer, Larry Molloy, Gerald Rowe

Basses: Tony Locatelli, Chuck Meyer, Jack Porritt, Rodney Westlake

Board of Directors: James R. Brooks, Gary A. Bryant (*Vice Pres.*), John T. Bryant, Lynn C. Bryant (*Sec.*), James K. Curto, Jeffrey Nicholls Curto, Pete Manderfield, John W. Markee, Carolyn Martin Meyer, Lawrence J. Molloy (*Treas.*), David H. Thomas, Dr. Brian D. Wake (*Pres.*), Dr. Joan P. Wake, Laura Wake Wiesner