

84th Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 27, 1990

Minister: Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

Organ Preludes Donald M. Ross

***Introit:** O Worship the King (D. B. C. Middleton)

Greetings: Dr. Fred W. Bryant

Hymn: We Praise Thee, O God

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

***Anthem:** Sing to the Lord, Our God (Pitoni)

Responsive Reading: Psalm 145

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

Scripture Readings: Deuteronomy 32: 1-7, 44-47, Hebrews 11 (selected verses), Luke 4:14-21

Pastoral Prayer & In Remembrance: Lettie (Bant) Rowell, 1899-1989
Gertrude (Iimatta) Heikka, 1912-1989
Mary (Rosemergy) Harvey, 1901-1989
Gwyneth (Rowe) Ralbott, 1906-1990
Ethel (Kneebone) Davey, 1893-1990
Julia (Cramer) Roberts, -1990
Helen (McLean) Hall, 1897-1990

Vocal Duet: Precious Memories (J. B. F. Wright)
Silas and Daniel Rosemergy

Announcements and Remarks: Dr. Fred W. Bryant

Offering and *Offertory Anthem: He, Watching Over Israel (F. Mendelssohn)

Doxology

Sermon: **Voices From the Past for the Future** (Abridged)

This Reunion Service has been held every summer since 1907. Today we stand with generations of descendants, local residents, and visitors who deeply value the lives and faith of those who made Central their home. They are with us today in spirit as we gather to remember, to worship, and to carry our shared faith story into the future.

Central Mine resident and church member Bessie Phillips left a wonderful account of a typical week in the life of the church. On Sundays, classes met at 9 a.m., services at 10:30, church school at 2:30 p.m., evening service at 6 p.m. Prayer meetings took place on Wed. and Sat. evening. On the first Sunday of the month, a joint prayer meeting was held "with the singing of hymns, readings of scripture, offering of prayer, and the recounting of personal experiences." Wouldn't you like just for a moment, an hour, to go back? To be there—to share in the conversations—to listen to what was happening in their lives—to

laugh and cry with them—to worship with them. As we let our ancestors talk with us, become a part of our lives, we come to understand ourselves better.

We can open our minds, imaginations, and spirits to those who came before us. We can begin to listen to their stories as told by Bessie Phillips, Alfred Nichols, Charles Stetter—by our own grandparents and parents as they tell us of their lives. By looking at photos, scrapbooks, and newspaper clippings, we can open ourselves to letting them come alive for us, to make them a continuing part of our living, worshipping, and celebrating. Not to do that is to shut out so much of our own identity.

I know some of you came today because you heard that the Executive Committee was bringing in a preacher who hears voices and you wanted to come and see for yourself how “daffy” he is. I’m a fan of the Smothers Brothers. On one show, Bill Dana does a skit imitating former Surgeon General Everett Koop. He said, “Just yesterday, I was talking to Louis Pasteur.” Dick Smothers responds, “Wait a minute, don’t you know Pasteur isn’t alive? He died years ago.” There’s a long pause and “Koop” finally says, “I didn’t say he answered me.” Let me suggest that we can talk to our ancestors who lived here at Central, to our faith ancestors across the centuries—and they will answer. I hear voices. Don’t you?

Don’t you hear the voices of the miners, talking as they go to work, of family dinner conversations, of preachers, of the choir, of children playing? Don’t you hear, too, the voices of Moses, Isaiah, Paul, and John? I do. I invite you to listen to these voices.

Our religion, our church history, is one of telling and retelling our faith stories. We do that because God is present, acting and speaking to us in those stories, big and small. We find God in our everyday lives, in our conversations, relationships, workplaces, struggles and hopes. As I listen to the voices coming out of these copper mining communities, I hear that their faith and church are central to who and what they are. To immigrate to this area, to be miners in the Copper Country, took courage, took faith, took hope that they would survive, and that they would be able to lead better lives. Their faith and church sustained them even in the most difficult times.

These stories could be added to the examples of faith we read from the Letters to the Hebrews. This is common in our faith history, both with the people of Israel in the Hebrew scriptures and with the early Christian communities. The retelling of stories reveals God’s faithfulness and the ways that we as humans respond in faith. These voices sustain us, give us hope, carry us into the future. They speak to us of the continuity of our faith over the generations.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. By faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, more acceptable not because of what he gave but because of his faith and the way he lived. By faith, Noah trusted God and built an ark to save his household and other creatures. By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called, and set out on a journey not knowing where he was going, but confident in God’s promise. By faith, Isaac and Jacob followed and were heirs of this same faith. Do you hear their voices?

By faith, the miners and engineers and their families came to work these mines and build their community. By faith, preachers came to share the simple truths of the Gospel. By faith, descendants and friends continue to remember and pay tribute. Do you hear their voices?

Are you listening? Regrettably, we often don’t listen. In a wonderful Peanuts cartoon, Charlie Brown—with both arms extended, proclaiming to no one in particular—“Yesterday, today, and tomorrow.” He’s interrupted as Sally walks up and just looks at him. He regains his composure and says, “You were listening to me, weren’t you?” Sally replies, “Of course, I was.” Charlie is taken aback. “Well, I’ll be,” he

says. He sits down with his chin in his hand, saying “How about that.” And looking up at Sally, says, “I’m not used to having somebody listen to what I have to say.”

All too frequently that’s true for us. We’re not listening. We are not opening ourselves to hearing the voices of faith that are there for us, and because of that, we fail to open ourselves to God’s presence. There is a connectedness between remembering and the way we live.

Now we are going to talk about creating and telling our own stories, and doing that by remembering the past, letting it speak to us for today, and giving it a new voice for tomorrow. Things don’t stay the same. It’s a different world than Moses dealt with, or Paul, or Central miners. What remains unchanged is God’s faithfulness and vision. We need to be working on what God has in mind for us. We must not allow ourselves to get stuck in the past. Unless we’ve got a foot planted firmly in the future, we’re not hearing the voices that call us to God’s vision.

Alfred Nichols tells a wonderful story that occurred while the men were sitting during a break on one of the mine levels. Someone asks, “Well, how did ‘e like the sarmon last night?” Another responds that he thought the preacher did a good job, though he had heard that same text preached from years ago and liked the sarmon lots better.” Another attentive listener became impatient with the continuing glowing tributes to the past. He finally said, “What’s the use to talk ‘bout so much what people used to do! The candle I used last week served the purpose for that particular time, but today I need another candle, and so the blessings of a month, a year ago, or twenty years ago filled their mission, too; but today I need another one. If we are to live ‘pon past experiences, pardner, we shan’t grow very much spiritually or mentally, shall us? Now in church matters, in mining, and in other things there are some people what es always tellin’ what they used to do. What we used to do may or may not have been all right, but what we do now, every day, is, to my mind, far more ‘portent.” (*More Copper Country Tales*, pp 58-59).

Now I like that guy’s thinking. He knows that we’re responsible for creating our own stories, and our own futures. And as we come to know our own stories, we find God in our own time, in our own place. Are you listening for God’s voice?

Remember this is our story. We must look at ourselves, at our own generation, at our own society and world. Hear God’s voice calling us to account, holding us responsible. We have work to do—on the environment, hunger and poverty, conflict and war, violence, education and health care. In the middle of all this, Moses reminds us that God is like a rock—faithful and without deceit, just and upright. God hasn’t given up on us but rather continues to call us to the simple word of love and into a future built on that love.

In the beginning of his ministry, Jesus recalls a voice from the past—of the prophet Isaiah. He read those words in the synagogue, and God’s vision took on new meaning in Jesus’ commitment to fulfilling that prophecy: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to those who are blind, and to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus used these words to guide his ministers. He leaves them to guide ours. The vision is far from a reality.

We are left here in this world to tend the garden that others have planted and cared for before us, and hopefully others will care for it in the future. But we are responsible for it now. Hear the voices.

Hymn: Now Thank We All Our God

Benediction, Response, and Postlude

Organist: Donald M. Ross

***Choir Members:** *Sopranos:* Susan Adams, Lois Gariepy, Mary Henderson, Betty Martin, Deanna Martin, Patricia Mitchell, Esther Rosemergy

Altos: Carol Bard, Nickie Bryant, Flora Graham, Carolyn Meyer

Tenors: Peter Manderfield, Dr. Stanley Martin, Silas Rosemergy, Mark Spreitzer

Basses: Dr. Fred Bryant, Jr., Randall Bryant, Jay Martin, Jack Porritt, Harry J. 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, Henry J. Vine, John E. Wilson