

91st Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 27, 1997

Minister: Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

Organ Preludes: Donald M. Ross

***Introit**

Greetings: Charles Stetter

Solo: Surely the Presence of the Lord Is in This Place (Lanny Wolfe)
Sharon Strieter

Hymn: From All That Dwells Below the Skies

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

Time with Children/Youth [showed children miner's pick ax, shovel, hard hat, shoe, lunch bucket; photos of miners]

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

Responsive Reading: Psalm 111: 1-5, 7-10

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

Scripture Readings: Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 20-25; Luke 10:25-37

Special Music: When Peace Like a River (It Is Well with My Soul) (Horatio G. Spafford)
Pat Mitchell, Donna Koskiniemi, Pete Manderfield, Dan Rosemergy

Pastoral Prayer & Remembrance: Ruth Stetter Rosemergy (1904-1996)

Announcements and Remarks: Charles Stetter

Offering and *Offertory Anthem: Look, Look, Ye Saints! The Sight Is Glorious

Doxology

Sermon: **From Memory to Faith: Life Stories** (Abridged)

Michael Williams, a United Methodist minister and wonderful storyteller, writes, "The telling of stories is woven into the fabric of our lives Story reminds us to which communities we belong."

Reflecting on the scriptures we heard earlier, what did they have in common? They both address the *heart of the law*—to love God, to love our neighbors. And both these reflections on the law were followed by *stories* that helped give them meaning, helped our understanding.

In Deuteronomy, the preacher seeks every possible way to urge the law upon the hearers and to persuade them to obey. Love of God through obedience to the law expresses itself in love and concern for others. This is followed by the wonderful story of the Exodus. Love God—and a story of God's love!

In Luke, the questioner asks, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and Jesus has him answer his own question: "What is written in the law: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus replies, "You

have given the right answer. Do this and you will live.” The man asks another question, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replies with the story of the Good Samaritan. Love God—and a story of God’s love!

These stories remind us of God’s presence and lead us to deeper faith. They are stories of God in our midst.

Alfred Nichols and other settlers and their descendants share stories of Central. Nichols’ stories are filled with the “love of God” and echo the stories of Deuteronomy and Luke. Nichols tells stories of this church, the choir, preachers, prayer, worship. One night, following supper, he left the boarding house,

having no particular place in view, but somehow my steps eventually were inclined toward the old church—it was the Hour of Prayer. As I neared the sacred edifice, I noticed the upper sashes of one or more windows were lowered, and out upon the stillness of that delightful evening came the song, ‘A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify.’ For a moment I stood spellbound, listening to the thrilling tones . . . I felt the blood stir in my veins as those rich voices continued their hymn of devotion. I was now at the church door; the melody had ceased. I entered the vestibule softly and listened. I pushed the door slightly ajar and saw a company composed entirely of men, kneeling in an attitude of prayer. One of the number, in accents of true and genuine devotion, communed with his Maker. His plea was to be made wholly clean; to be prepared for the duties of the coming day, for the duties of life. I lingered . . . My heart was strangely touched. How beautiful that scene; how inspiring its influence; how noble its purpose. These old patriarchs, who after the toils and cares of the week felt as did one of old; that it was a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord. (*More Copper Country Tales*, pp. 30-31).

Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart!

And the stories of caring for neighbors:

In case of serious injury, a fellow miner offered his services to stay through the night with the afflicted one. The next night some other miner made a similar request. These modes of assistance sometimes continued for several weeks—all of which were in addition to [the miners’] daily work.

Love your neighbor as yourself!

Remembering your story. I love stories and always have. I remember as a little boy sitting on the floor next to the wood box on the back porch of my grandparents’ home—the smell of the wood, the crackling of the fire, sun streaming through the windows filled with plants. My grandfather rocking, puffing on his pipe, and telling stories of the copper mines—the horse-drawn wagons filled with dynamite or supplies and, of course, copper ore. The long day’s work, often underground. The family gatherings. The small Centennial Mine Church filled to overflowing—the prayers, the singing, the sermons. Life stories. Faith stories linking the past and present, linking me with my family, my history, my faith. All these stories helping me piece together who I was and what’s important in life, what we should commit ourselves to--what it is we work and hope for, what it is that sustains us through the difficult times.

My own family spent hours around the kitchen or dining room table or in the living room talking, sharing the day and telling stories. Often, we had heard them before but we wanted to hear them again. I hope that you have such memories, such stories in your life and that you are telling your stories to your own

family and friends and church family. Stories are who we are. For people of faith, our stories become faith stories, central to the community of faith, and we pass them on from generation to generation.

A spiritual wasteland. I'm concerned that we don't share our personal stories as much as we once did. In our fast-paced world, we don't take the time to get to know one another through telling and listening to stories. In a wonderful article in *Weavings* ["The Story-Shaped Life"], author Sue Monk Kidd suggests that "Rendering the inner tale into a story is a spiritual discipline rarely practiced by Christians today." She references Sam Keen (*To a Dancing God*) that a new type of person has emerged in our society, the person without a story. We have left the storied approach to life at the nursery door "and have crossed the threshold into adulthood to more logical, didactic ways of making sense of the world. In a culture that is rational, scientific, and abstract, we have lost touch with the intuitive, imaginative, and concrete dimension which inform story."

As the church has made theology and doctrine the core of religious expression, we have become unstoried in the spiritual life as well, distracted from the theophanies ever happening within and around us. We have lost the ability to probe the soul, to know and refine its experience. I hope this isn't true for us, for if we don't tell our stories, we begin to lose the sense of who we are. We must be sure that we're not becoming people without stories—and that involves our being willing to tell our stories and for others to be willing to listen (and the reverse).

Lynn Huber, Coordinator of the Stillpoint School for Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Direction, wrote as part of her credo: "I believe that the greatest gift we can offer to each other is the telling and listening to our stories. This empowers us to appropriate and live out our own stories, unifies us in diversity, and leads us to reconciliation." By telling our stories, we get in touch with God: "By entering into past occasions of grace and joy, we experience again the gift of God's love and healing" [Kathleen Fischer].

In our stories, we find God at work, present in our lives. Real faith growth involves glimpsing God in and around us. Sue Monk Kidd suggests that discovering our personal stories is an important part of our spiritual quest and that at a deep level, we *are* stories being told by the Great Storyteller. We are called to participate with God in telling our stories. We are co-story tellers with God. I love that idea and way of thinking about our lives and our stories.

Eli Weisel has said that God loves stories and thus created human beings—billions of stories being created, shaped, and told—all a part of the great story of God's love for humankind.

Dan Wakefield in *The Story of Your Life* says, "To draw a map of our spiritual journey is to look for the experiences and changes, the turning points, triumphs and crashes, dark nights and mountain peaks we have traveled to become the kind of person we are." I invite you to do that.

In the telling of our own stories, we find ourselves—and God—but we also recognize ourselves in others' stories and they in ours—and God is in their stories, too. We begin to feel connected. We share, create, and build communities, and our communities have stories that continue to bind us together. We remember God was present, is present, and will be present. *Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*

Alfred Nichols concludes his story of the Hour of Prayer meeting: "Much could be said of their splendid ideals and honorable purposes in life—such strong and noble characters they were . . . They have left behind them an ideal . . . a guiding star to their children's children" (p. 31).

Jesus valued individual stories as shown in his responses, teachings, the parables. Re-reading the Gospel stories, one sees how Jesus valued every person's life story—the stories of the woman at the well; the rich, young ruler; the widow who had lost her only son. These stories reveal how important each is. In the Good Samaritan story, the focus is not just on the man left stripped and beaten on the side of the road, or just on the Samaritan who stopped to bind up his wounds and care for him, but also on those who passed by. The listeners began to identify with each of them and it was their story, too.

True remembering—storytelling—is reliving the past to give meaning to the present and hope for the future. The liturgy of the Hebrew people for Passover includes, “Forever after, in every generation, all of us must think of ourselves as having gone forth from Egypt. It was not only our ancestors that the Holy One, blessed be God, redeemed; us, too, the living, God redeemed together with them.” This story of bondage, liberation, and journey is not just about ancient Israel; it is our story, too.

In telling and listening to the Gospel stories of Jesus, Christians can more readily identify times that God was present in their own lives. In *Hymns to an Unknown God*, Sam Keen urges each of us to “examine the sacred texts of our daily experiences, reconstruct the events and relationships that went into the creation of our very being, re-collect memories and form them into narratives that make your life a once-told tale.” It's a journey of faith. It's a journey into wholeness. Celebrate your story!

Hymn: Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken

Benediction, Response, Postlude

Organist: Donald M. Ross

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

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

Tenors: Norman Everett, Pete Manderfield, Stanley Martin, Mark Spreitzer

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

Board of Directors: James R. Brooks, Dr. Fred W. Bryant (*V. Pres.*), Gary A. Bryant, Robert J. Bryant, James K. Curto, Jeffrey Nicholls Curto, David C. Heikka, *Hollace G. Roberts, Donald M. Ross, R. Charles Stetter (*Pres.*), David H. Thomas (*Sec./Treas.*), Harry J. Vine, Dr. Brian D. Wake, *John E. Wilson **Emeritus Status*