

97th Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 27, 2003

Minister: Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

***Introit** O Worship the Lord

Greetings & Announcements: Gary Bryant

Hymn: For All the Saints

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

Time with Children/Youth [Central School stories]

***Anthem:** Praise God (McAlpine)

Responsive Reading: Psalm 121 and 122

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

Scripture Readings: Genesis 18:1-8; Luke 9:1-6; Romans 12:9-13

Special Music: The Old Ship of Zion
Pat Mitchell, Donna Koskiniemi, Pete Manderfield, Dan Rosemergy

Hear Our Prayer, O God [Call to Prayer]

Pastoral Prayer

Offering and *Offertory Anthem: Love Grows Here (Besig)

Doxology

Sermon: **Boarding House Tales: Hospitality and Fellowship** (Abridged)

Today we're going to reflect on hospitality and fellowship, experiences that we yearn for yet struggle to find or create. We'll do that by sharing faith stories, Central stories, and our own stories.

I invite you to imagine the life of the early settlers—leaving home (mines closed in Cornwall), traveling thousands of miles often not knowing anyone, uncertain of job opportunities, tired from the long journey, homesick, scared. Where could you even get room and board? In *More Copper Country Tales*, Alfred Nichols devotes a chapter to the Boarding House.

The Big Boarding House! . . . Its purpose, primarily, was to provide a home for miners young and older, and, incidentally, a night's shelter for the occasional transient. It also served as a rally center, a rendezvous for the tall-story club, and a lounging place for the carefree. Its door was never locked and nobody ever knocked. The old hostelry at Central accommodated about 25, virtually all of them Cornish men, their wives or sweethearts in the homeland—the country of pasties and cream. (p. 160)

Call to Prayer. As we prepare for this time of reflection, I share the words of the great Christian mystic, Mechtild of Magdeburg: "How should one live? / Live / welcoming / to all." Are we? Do we live our lives welcoming all?

I've been thinking about these questions. Are we welcoming to all? Are we hospitable as individuals and as a society? Are we in touch with the centrality of hospitality in our faith stories and history? Hospitality is a central theme throughout our faith tradition, in the stories of the people of Israel in the Hebrew scriptures, in the Gospels and Pastoral Letters of Paul to the early church community, and on through the centuries to our time. However, I'm afraid we've lost the openness to the ancient, traditional practice of hospitality in our society, which we need to recapture as a central tenet of our faith, and as a way to live together in community, society, and global village.

Scripture stories of hospitality. Genesis 18:1-8. This story portrays hospitality extended to strangers. Abraham see the three strangers, runs to meet them, honors them, invites them in, refreshes them, has Sarah prepare them food, serves them. He gives the best he has. He understands himself to be their servant.

Luke 9:1-6. This motif of hospitality extends into the New Testament. The kind of hospitality God is calling for is not just about entertaining friends—it is about welcoming strangers and aliens. Jesus tells his disciples to bring nothing with them but to stay in the homes of those they meet. Jesus expects hospitality. This sets the pattern of hospitality in the mission of the early church and is crucial to the conduct of the church's mission. The practice of hospitality gives witness to the power of the "good news" of Jesus to create communities.

Romans 12:9-18. "Let love be genuine"—love stands out at the head of the list, followed by ways to build community—to share with others in need (fellowship) and "to extend hospitality to strangers"—to be eager to be hospitable. In an article "Households of Faith," James McGinnis writes that hospitality is at the heart of a true household of faith, but he goes on to say that our culture and the way we practice our faith offers a conflicting image—more on that later.

Boarding House hospitality. In *Beyond the Boundaries*, Larry Lankton writes:

The men who came up to Lake Superior to perform this arduous labor and live in primitive and isolated mine camps were almost all in their 20s or 30s and single. They lived in company boarding houses As many as 18 to 20 men bunked together in one or one-and-a-half story structures The men slept stacked up in hard, tiered bunks. . . . Their personal stuff of life was minimal and maybe just filled a satchel or trunk A man's peace and quiet, and his personal security, were constantly at the mercy of the others he boarded with." (p. 54).

On the surface, it doesn't sound like great hospitality. The Central Boarding House was built in 1861 and accommodated 25-35 guests. In Nichols' account, you see that this was more than a place to sleep.

. . . the boarding house provided plenty of good, wholesome food The table was operated on the help-yourself plan, and every man for himself. . . . Supper being over, they repaired to the 'men's room' Here yarns were spun; questions social, political, industrial was cussed and discussed ad liberatum. Generally, the men's home life was genial, fun loving, jesting. Occasionally there was serious discussion of every phase of life. Sometimes the evening resolved into a story-telling club, wherein the spirit of repartee became decidedly keen. (pp. 161-163)

All were welcomed, room and board provided with little formality and a general warmth. Registration, says Nichols, was "Oh, that's alright, my son, just hang up your hat. That's all there es to et." I don't want to romanticize the boarding house. It was very basic, crowded, sharing beds, no privacy, simple food. But it was more than that. It provided a place to begin building a new life; a place to share traditions, stories,

hopes; a place to get support; a place to be cared for—a place that welcomed the stranger and provided hospitality.

Hospitality stories—A second look. In the stories we've heard are important insights into real hospitality, a hospitality too often lacking in our lives and society today—and it has to do with living “welcoming to all.” Today many live in gated or segregated communities. We generally worship and play with those like us. We are guarded with strangers. We need to be open to those different from ourselves.

In *Public and Private*, the classicist Susan Wiltshire writes about ancient hospitality and says, “Modern hospitality is typically a transaction among friends. Ancient hospitality is a transaction among strangers. Modern hospitality reinforces our familiarities. Ancient hospitality alters us by exposing us to outsiders.” Ancient hospitality is more laden and dangerous because it changes us, offering possibility and transformation. Hospitality to the stranger gives us the chance to see our lives afresh through different eyes. The possibility is that it is God to whom we are providing hospitality.

In *Genesis*, the hospitality story we heard follows narratives of creation, the flood and covenant with Noah, the Tower of Babel—all leading to God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah, ancestors of a multitude of nations. The hospitality story is followed by the announcement that Sarah will give birth, and, at some point, Abraham recognizes that God has appeared to him in the form of the three strangers. In offering hospitality, the lives Abraham and Sarah are transformed. That hospitality toward God is a response of the whole self in the midst of everyday life.

In *Luke*, when Jesus sends out his disciples to receive the hospitality of strangers, their lives are transformed as they come to realize the truth and power of Jesus' teachings and healings. Their experiences are universalized. They are one with all those who have been ignored or oppressed but are now welcome in an inclusive community. In *Romans*, Paul repeatedly talks about the transforming power of community, dealing with one another in love; finding our common humanity in association and mutual care; being strengthened by the Spirit in their midst.

Central. In similar ways, hospitality and creation of community and fellowship occurred here at Central—in the Boarding House but also in other places—the church, general store, mine, school, community celebrations—where the stranger was welcomed, taken in, accepted, respected, and included in the community.

Roberta Porter writes in the poem “Community of Faith”: Here / we bring our common brokenness / and blessing; / healing happens / by God's grace, / and our gifts are given / for service. / Here, in Christ's love and compassion, / we belong to each other, / here the stranger is welcomed, / and called / friend.”

Practicing ancient hospitality in our contemporary world. We live at a time when we desperately need to learn how to live together across divides of race, ethnicity, nationality, ability, sexual orientation, faith, socio-economic class—with love, mutual respect, and openness to having our lives transformed, made more inclusive, and at one with the Creator-Spirit God. We need to overcome barriers, biases, exclusivity, and claims to possessing absolute truth (as against others' truths/lived experiences). We need to know one another.

A colleague shared a wonderful story about a parishioner, Charlie, 96 years old, who invited her to lunch at his home, an invitation she accepted out of courtesy and a sense of obligation. When she arrives, a blooming apple tree branch is on the coffee table. Charlie says it broke off in the wind, “I knew it would be glad to add beauty and fragrance to our lunch.” As they go into the kitchen, she sees an array of vegetables and he asks her to select which she wants and then cooks them. He invites her to the table:

“The dishes, though chipped and aged, are filled with beautiful and tantalizing food.” He prays a blessing that begins, “Thank you, God, for my friend Cora. Thank you for helping me to prepare a table for her. . . Help us not to forget you as we taste your goodness to us. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.” Cora says, “We eat, laugh, share. Charlie’s generosity has touched me deeply: I have changed, I appreciate God’s gifts more, I fully sense God’s presence . . . My meal that Friday with Charlie was communion. . . .” [Cora Crow Poteet]. That’s what hospitality is about.

I wish for all of you: to live transformed lives as you welcome the stranger; a deeper and broader sense of your humanity; and the abiding presence of the Spirit God.

Hymn: Let There Be Light

Benediction, Response (God Be with You Until We Meet Again), Postlude

Organist & Choir Director: Mark Spreitzer

***Choir Members:** *Sopranos:* Susan Adams, Carol Bard, Joanne Bollinger, Tacy Flint, Donna Koskiniemi, Valerie Koskiniemi, Pat Mitchell

Altos: Glenna Irwin, Dorothy Kemp, Connie Martin, Marcia Mason, Theresa Rekawek, Bobbi Stimac

Tenors: Jim Irwin, Peter Manderfield, Stanley Martin, Ramsey Meyer, Tom Westlake, Mark Spreitzer

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

Page Turner: Debbie Manderfield

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