

**96th Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 28, 2002**

**Minister:** Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

**\*Introit** Blessed Jesus, At Thy Word (Ahle)

**Greetings & Announcements:** Dr. Joan Wake

**Hymn:** We Praise Thee, O God, Our Redeemer, Creator

**Invocation and Lord's Prayer**

**Time with Children/Youth**

**\*Anthem:** Here I am, Lord (Schutte)

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

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

**Scripture Readings:** Deuteronomy 24:14-15, 19-22; Matthew 20:1-16; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

**Special Music:** It's Me, It's Me, O Lord (Standing in Need of Prayer)  
Pat Mitchell, Donna Koskiniemi, Pete Manderfield, Dan Rosemergy

Hear Our Prayer, O God [Call to Prayer]

**Pastoral Prayer & Remembrance:** Alma Mildred Ford, -2001, Rev. Dr. Winfield S. Haycock, 1914-2002

**Offering and \*Offertory Anthem:** Wings of the Dawn (Spencer)

**Doxology**

**Sermon:** **Saarvey Day: Contracts, Covenants, and Celebrations** (Abridged)

This year, following the events of 9/11, I have needed to be here—*in this place*, where I was born and raised; *with this faith community*, which grounds my faith, spanning the years and generations; *to be with you*; and *to know that "all is well with our souls."* It is a different world, and we all need to claim in new ways what it is we value--family, friends, community, and faith.

*Call to Reflection:* O God, help us look at ourselves and our lives honestly--our work and the contracts we make with the world; our vocations and the covenants we make with one another; our lives and what it is we celebrate. Amen.

Do you know what Saarvey Day was here at Central? In *More Copper Country Tales*, Alfred Nichols has a chapter on it that captures not just the day but the life and spirit here at Central. I want to take you along on that journey and to suggest that Saarvey Day has a lot to say to us today. Nichols confesses that the term was ambiguous (preachers like me are fine with ambiguous). Saarvey Day has several meanings, both in derivation and usage.

*Saarvey Day:* Contracts. Nichols asserts that the term's correct usage is "Survey Day," when the measuring of contracts were disposed of and prices adjusted for a new contract for the next month.

At Central Mine, as in other mines of this district, Saarvay Day was held on Friday, the day preceding pay day. During the morning hours the captain, with his assistant, visited each place of toil where a contract had been assigned, measured the extent of their excavations and, early in the afternoon, all parties assembled about the captain's office and, in turn, were called before that official to be informed of the standing of their monthly account and, again, to accept 'next month's contract,' the price per fathom varying with consistency as the nature of rock to be mined seemed to indicate. (p. 12)

In *Calumet Copper and People*, Arthur Thurner writes, "The Cornish transplanted to the Lake Superior district the dual wage system of their native land. Under this, a man engaged directly in ore production was paid a share of the value produced; when he was seeking shafts, he received contract payments for the amount of work he did."

In *Beyond the Boundaries: Life and Landscape at the Lake Superior Copper Mines, 1840-1875*, Larry Lankton describes the haggling that would go on to get the captain to raise the contract rate from the prior month, often unsuccessfully. Before settling, costs of supplies would be deducted (powder, fuses, candles, drill bits) and what was left over would be shared with partners (pp. 108-109). The contract rate was about \$50/month, but often was less, creating problems for the miners in meeting their own living expenses, supporting families back in Cornwall, and saving to bring them over. This monthly negotiation was important.

*Matthew 20:1-16*. In a way, Jesus had a parable about Saarvay Day—the parable of the generous employer, sometimes called the parable of the workers in the vineyard. The surprise jolt comes in the payment at the end of the day. More about that later.

*Contemporary Contracts*. Today, all of us in one way or another negotiate or at least agree to our wages or salaries, most often on an annual basis. We also live at a time when there are great injustices in the economic scale of particular work compared to others, growing gaps between the wealthy and poor, and a distrust of the corporate world and stock market. We should be valuing anew all work and attribute to it dignity and worth, compensating workers at a level that both rewards and provides income adequate to meet the basic necessities of life. As people of faith, we should heed the words of the Hebrew scriptures calling on us "not to withhold the wages of the poor and needy laborers" and pay attention to the vineyard owner who dealt generously with the workers in special need. It is time to take account of our contracts with all our people and bring economic justice to all.

*Saarvay Day: Covenants*. Saarvay Day has other meanings. Nichols writes that the term is a corruption of "Serving Day," i.e., serving and rendering official services to the employees in various forms (p. 12). This understanding broadens the significance of the day. It embraces the company's responsibilities to the workers, and the workers to the company—working together to make the mining operation a success but also a sense of mutuality in creating a mining team and community. The company service to the miners often included travel loans paid off over time, housing at a subsidized rent, treatment and medicines administered by the company doctor, to name a few. The company also provided businesses and services for the community—the company store, butcher shop, school and teachers, and materials for building this church.

*Everyone* has a responsibility in making an endeavor succeed and in creating community. Everyone in the community should be provided and cared for. This covenant extends beyond mining teams to families, church, community. In this definition, Saarvay Day was a monthly reminder that everyone was there to serve one another.

Nichols recounts a conversation with the engineer operating the “man engine,” who personifies the engine and has a keen sense of responsibility of the miners’ safety: “In all these years we have never had an accident in bringing men to surface, and it seems as if she do know it, too. Seems to me when the men es come up, she like to have me by her side, spoken a cheerful word wance on a while; she seems to work better, and by her side I do stand too, wan hand at the throttle and the other at the reverse. When the men es all up, I close her down and say to her: Wance moore that are up, my dear, and all’s well.”

*The Vineyard Parable.* The workers hired at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour received a denarius, causing the workers hired in the first hour to expect they would receive much more, but no, they, too, as agreed, received a denarius. I think the owner was aware of the great need of those who for whatever reason had not been hired at the earlier hours. He provided for them out of his generosity. In his own way, it was a “serving day.” I think that Jesus, in shaping the parable, remembered the many reminders in the Hebrew scripture asking those who harvest to leave the gleanings for the alien, the orphan, the widow—those in need, another example of “serving day.”

In our Living Wage Campaign in Nashville, we spent time talking to some of the 1,300+ workers who were paid below the proposed living wage rate, most living below the poverty level, working hard, doing important work—cleaning, day care, nursing home care. How can we justify the indignity of their struggle as they serve us and do good work? The miners here at Central faced the same struggle. This is the heart of our contemporary dilemma—too many people who can’t respect themselves when the work they do is not valued enough to compensate them adequately. Too often we lose the sense of covenant with one another and the larger community. We lose a sense of our responsibility to one another. People of faith should be at the center of setting this right. We need a contemporary “Serving Day.”

*Saarvay Day: Celebrations.* In addition to the meanings described, Saarvay Day encompassed all that Central was and stood for celebrated by the community at the end of every month. It was a celebration of the miners and their families, a community with schools, church, shops; a community that celebrated together and cared for one another when illness or accident struck. For the miners, it was more than a job. It was a vocation, a calling. It was their life, their passion. Their lives echoed the words of Thessalonians calling on a community to live together in harmony, to love one another, to contribute their work and service to the community.

While Alfred Nichols shares wonderful memories of Saarvay Day, it can be more than a memory. It can be *a continuing and living reality* if we make it so.

In *Peanuts*, Linus and Charlie Brown are talking about their favorite teacher returning. Charlie asks, “How much do you think Miss Othmar gets paid for teaching?” Linus shouts, “PAID? PAID? Do you seriously think that Miss Othmar would ever accept MONEY for teaching? THAT’S OUTRAGEOUS! To Miss Othmar, teaching is a PURE ART FORM!!” Their conversation continues. Linus: “Why would Miss Othmar want to take money for teaching? What joy can money bring her that is beyond the joy of seeing her pupils learn?” Charlie says, “I never thought of it that way.” Linus responds, “Well, it’s time you did! Miss Othmar and her kind are a breed apart!” Charlie asks, “How does one go about apologizing to a breed apart?” In the final strip, Linus has discovered Miss Othmar gets paid. “Oh, Miss Othmar, how could you?” he says. “I thought you were teaching us because you LOVED us! I never dreamed you were getting PAID for it. WAIT A MINUTE! Maybe she’s getting paid, but yet not really accepting the money! I’ll bet that’s it! I’ll bet she’s turning it all back in! Oh, Miss Othmar, you’re a true gem!” Sorry, Linus, but when we work, we need to be paid for the real value of our work, even when we love our work and those we serve.

Jesus cared in so many ways—for the poor and outcast, the sick and rejected. He lived his life each day to create inclusive communities, welcoming and caring for all. I think Jesus loved life, loved people. He saw the best in them but never hesitated to confront religious and political authorities in the face of injustice. His simple parables speak to new possibilities and the generosity and grace of God. Each of us has a responsibility to reflect that generosity in the world today—and that begins with faith.

Matthew Fox, founder of *Creation Spirituality*, suggests that each of us face the theme of vocation or calling. Somehow the Maker of the Universe calls us to be participants in the work of the universe. He calls this “a heart call.” We should listen with open hearts and respond. He writes, “Belief is not primarily about dogmas but about action. If we believe in a future, we will act like it; and included in this activity may well be a whole new way of working in the world.” He adds that our work is a sacrament. This is at the heart of my understanding of Saarvay Day for our time. Join me in reflecting on ways you can create better futures for yourself and others.

- (1) *Examine our contracts.* (a) Are you doing the work you really want to do, the work that is your passion? If not, try to change it, or try to find other avenues for your vocation dreams. (b) Are you being fairly compensated for your work? If not, speak up for yourself personally or work with those groups that might represent you. (c) Are those in your employ being compensated fairly? If not try to do better by them, give them the dignity of their work.
- (2) *Renewing our covenants.* (a) Are you fulfilling your responsibilities as a covenant partner in your family, with other workers, your company or organization, your community? (b) Are you giving voice to those in your community who have no effective voice regarding their status, work, and pay? (c) Are you willing to do your share in providing services, affordable housing, and health care for those with special needs, the homeless, the unemployed?
- (3) *Living our celebrations, celebrating our living.* (a) Are you listening to life stories, taking time for rambling conversations? Are you celebrating the presence of those in your life? (b) Are you helping your congregation or community celebrate all that it is and can be? (c) Are you celebrating your life as a participant in the work of the universe? Are you answering your heart-call?

Make every day a Saarvay Day by living our faith, taking action to create our futures, with love, compassion, dignity, and justice for all.

**Hymn:** Dear Lord and Father of Mankind

**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, Donna Koskiniemi, Valerie Koskiniemi, Pat Mitchell, Sharon Strieter, Ann Jarvis Tomlinson

*Altos:* Dorothy Kemp, Connie Martin, Dee Martin, Marcia Mason, Carolyn Meyer, Hilary Meyer, Theresa Rekawek, Bobbie Stimac

*Tenors:* Norman Everett, Peter Manderfield, Stanley Martin, Ramsey Meyer

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

*Page Turner:* Debbie Manderfield

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