

107th Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 28, 2013

Minister: Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

***Introit** Come, Let Us Tune Our Loftiest Song (West/Hatton)

Greetings & Announcements: Pete Manderfield

Hymn: Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

A Time with Children/Youth [Photo Collage, Story of James Rosemergy, Calling Out of Family Names, Cornish Currant Cookies and Copper]

***Anthem:** How Can I Keep From Singing (Traditional, arr. Honoré)

Responsive Reading: 1st Sunday Second Reading – A New Song

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

Scripture Readings: Joshua 1:1-9; Timothy 1:1-7

Special Music: I Love to Tell the Story (Hankey/Fischer)
Carolyn Meyer, Deanna Martin, Pete Manderfield, Dan Rosemergy

Pastoral Prayer and Moment of Remembrance: Susan Harvey Adams, 1946-2012
Douglas Levern Wake, 1917-2012

Offering and *Offertory Anthem: In the Seasons of Our Silence (Sandra T. Ford)

Doxology

Sermon: **Life Stories: A Journey of Love, Hope, and Grace** (Abridged)

This is Part II of my 1997 Central sermon "From Memory to Faith: Life Stories." Only at Central can you do Part II of a sermon 16 years later. This is not a repeat of Part I, which was about the ways we come to realize that we all are a part of God's story, of one universal story. We tried to hear the stories of our faith in new ways; and, as we reaffirm our own stories, to have them become the faith stories for generations to come.

Lynn Huber, Coordinator of the Still Point School for Spiritual Formation, as part of a Credo wrote, "I believe that the greatest gift we can offer to each other is the telling and listening to our stories." Where do you have a chance to tell your stories? It's really important.

To get started, you have to believe you have a unique, important story to tell. I love stories. One of my favorite storytellers at the annual International Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, TN, is Donald Davis, who was a Methodist minister for 20 years. He wrote *Telling Your Own Stories*, a book for those who live with the misconception that they have no stories to tell. The premise is that all stories are about memorable people, places, or happenings. We all have such stories but often fail to tell them.

Another of my favorite storytellers is the musician John McCutcheon, who tells the story of opera singer Paul Robeson who sang at the first concert in the new opera hall in Sidney, Australia. The workers were

not on a plaque or noted in the program, so Robeson gave a pre-concert for all the workers who constructed the opera house: "This is your opera house, the one you built." McCutcheon wrote a Christmas story for his family, tell the story from Joseph's perspective, "The Gospel According to Joe." It celebrates the unnamed, unknown many who contribute to momentous change; one verse--"When Harriet Tubman came knocking / I hid her safe in my barn /When the Nazis came rounding up Jews in our town / My loft kept them sheltered from harm / When Martin marched into Montgomery / I was right there at his side." The chorus goes:

Will they remember my name in the evenings
When the fire fades to embers and coals?
Recall the deeds I have done?
Will I be the one?
Or will my life be
The greatest story never told?

I don't want my life, your life, to be the greatest story never told. So let's think about where and to whom we can tell our stories. Here at Central is a right place, because it is packed full of stories of its settlers. Their stories are a part of the rich history and tradition of mining communities. Each person played an important part in creating homes, raising children, establishing a vital town, building a church and community. Their lives were grounded in the faith stories they heard, read, and retold—the sermons discussed, the hymns sung, their faith renewed. We carry these stories into our lives. We add our stories.

Faith Stories. Our own stories, individually and collectively, are part of God's story, the universal story of humankind and our world over time. Stories of the present become stories of the past and point to stories of the future, all of which are sacred. The sacred scriptures of our Bible are stories of the ways in which people of the time lived and experienced the sacred and understood God. It's only over time that the fullest sense of God emerges. Our faith deepens and grows. It is important that we sense the sacred every day in all of life and tell about it in our own stories. Not to do that is to deprive ourselves of knowing ourselves, and deprives future generations of stories to help guide and give meaning to their lives and to truly know us. Our scriptures this morning give us a glimpse into the lives of Joshua and Timothy.

Joshua. ("The Lord is help") His life is told in the books of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and especially in Joshua. He was Moses' personal aide and military captain, accompanying him when he ascended Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. He attended the Sacred Tent of Meeting prior to the establishment of the Tabernacle. Before Moses died, he appointed Joshua as his successor. Joshua became a prophet in his own right and led the Israelites into Canaan. Joshua's was an important story.

Timothy. (Timotheus) He was a youthful and earnest disciple of Jesus, and Paul loved him dearly. Paul had found him during one of his missionary journeys and, discovering how highly he was esteemed as a Christian, selected him as his assistant. Afterward, Timothy became Paul's companion in travel and was the first Bishop of Ephesus. In Paul's letters to Timothy, in addition to directions for his leadership, he speaks of Timothy's early days, of his mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois), both Jewish women who loved God and passed on stories of God. They sought to instill in Timothy that love and knowledge. Paul deeply valued passing down the faith and faith stories for next generations.

Joshua and Timothy are important biblical figures whose stories give us a glimpse of their beliefs, work, and faith. Their stories become ours as we are bound in faith over the centuries.

Central Stories. Hundreds of stories coming out of Central (1855-1898) and particularly this church (1868-1903) have been told many times and in different forms—books, journals, sermons. Alfred Nichols was a prolific teller of Central stories in his book *More Copper Country Tales*, his journal, and his autobiography *The Story of My Life*. He captured life here in Central in moving, colorful, and humorous ways—the boarding houses, the church, the school, the mine, the celebrations—and individual “characters.” I love these stories and each time I re-read them, they are alive to me, to us, today. That’s the way stories are—they can be told again and again, and should be.

In re-reading parts of Nichols’ journal, I was moved by the frequent mention of his wife, Eliza Chinn Nichols—his love for her and ways she supported him over the years. He recalls their meeting: “One evening I was asked to accompany a young lady home after dark, the road being rough and stoney, the evening dark, and the cows roaming. I said it would be a pleasure. Suffice to say, the path we followed led to courtship, matrimony, and one daughter and five sons.” It was Eliza who supported and encouraged him after his mining accident, urged him to complete his public school education and go to college. While finances were tight, they made it. He returned here, becoming the principal at the Central School and the Commissioner of Schools. Eliza was at his side and has her own stories.

The Keweenaw County Historical Society has compiled stories of Central Mine, the church, and individuals and families—Alfred Nichols; The Bennetts Family, The Jilberts, James, Rowes, Jarves; the elopement of Edith Robert; the Kingston genealogy; the Bryants, *Living in a Ghost Town* (Eloise “Duffy” Liddicoat). So many stories. I highlight just one from “The Bryants in Central”—of Jane Ivey Bryant. She was born in St. Ives, Cornwall, came to Michigan, married Edward Bryant in 1875, and had 5 children. Edward was an underground miner (No. 2) and was killed in a mining accident in 1883. Jane returned to Cornwall for “serious soul searching” but soon resolved to return to the New World. She worked in sundry ways to support her family—confectionary (making candies) and millinery, designing and making hats with creativity and artistry. Hearty stock. These stories, individually and collectively, tell the story of Central. They are our stories.

Our Stories. Are you telling your stories? Where are you telling your stories? In “The Story-Shaped Life” (*Weavings* J/F 1989), Sue Monk Kidd writes, “Making one’s inner journey into story is a life-giving endeavor. If done with authenticity and openness to the indwelling spirit, it can be a tool in the transformation of the soul.” Kidd suggests that (a) the inner story creates identity, transforming our vision of who we are; (b) the inner story converts and transforms us by sustaining us in the midst of suffering; and (c) the inner tale transforms by reorienting us to new truth and insight, breaking open the hidden holy that dwells in our experience.

How does this happen? How can it happen? We need to work at it, to find times, places, and people to tell our stories to. Some ideas: (a) Remember your story. Create your own spiritual autobiography. (b) Write your thoughts, reflections, over time in a journal. (c) Share with spiritual or faith friends, over meals, through books, etc. (d) Share in churches, e.g., in new member sessions, collect stories of members, share in service meditations, in religious education classes. (e) Record stories with and for family members. (f) Write your story as a family history. (g) Tell your stories in groups, at festivals. (h) Contribute to Story Corps [an American non-profit organization whose mission is to record, preserve, and share the stories of Americans from all backgrounds and beliefs].

In a *Peanuts* cartoon, the first frame shows a school classroom in which a girl is seated next to Linus, whose head is drooping in sleep. In the second frame, Linus is sitting on the couch next to Lucy. Lucy asks him, “How was school today?” Linus replies, “I failed story listening.” We cannot fail to listen. The Story Corps sponsors a National Day of Listening, “a day to honor a loved one through listening.”

Novelist Ann Patchett observes that “as human beings, we process our lives through story . . . over time.” Look for real life stories that reveal love, hope, and grace.

Love. Maggie is over 90. She works 7 days/week at the restaurant in Chattanooga that she and her daughters founded, before the building of the Aquarium, a lone new downtown business. Her daughters Sally and Susan Moses tell of Maggie’s love and encouragement.

Hope. In the parking lot of Buckley’s Mountainside Canoes here in Michigan was a spot where no one could park, at least for a few months, because its owners Bob and Liz Busch had discovered a female snapping turtle laying eggs there. They protected the nest. “Liz hopes that all the eggs hatch, which will give her family a chance to watch them before they instinctively head toward the Chippewa River If they hatch and make their way to the river, they will be safe from human predators for years.”

Grace. The Baptist preacher Will Campbell fought racism in the South. In his autobiographical book *Brother to a Dragonfly*, he writes, “Suddenly, everything became clear. Everything. It was a revelation Loved [by God]. And if loved, forgiven. And if forgiven, reconciled.”

Sue Monk Kidd writes, “Discovering my inner story reveals God in time and place, *my* time and place. It sharpens God’s voice in the common places where it often goes unnoticed—between the lines in life, so to speak Such awareness transforms life from a series of random events into the poetic realm of the sacred tale.” We love by sharing our stories. We love by listening to the stories of others.

Hymn: Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise

Benediction

Response: God Be With You Til We Meet Again

Organist: Father Corbin Eddy

Choir Director: Carolyn Martin Meyer

***Choir Members:** *Sopranos:* Carol Bard, Joanne Bollinger, Tacy Flint, Charlene Marculis, Nancy Molloy

Altos: Connie Martin, Deanna Martin, Lani Poynter

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

Basses: Graham 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