

95th Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 29, 2001

Minister: Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

***Introit** Surely the Presence of the Lord Is in This Place (Wolfe)
Sharon Strieter, Soprano

Greetings & Announcements: Dr. Brian W. Wake

Hymn: For the Beauty of the Earth

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

Time with Children/Youth

***Anthem:** All Things Bright and Beautiful (Rutter)

Responsive Reading: Isaiah 1: selected & Micah 6:8

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

Scripture Readings: John 15:11-17; 1 Philipians 2:1-4

Special Music: What a Fellowship (Hoffman)
Pat Mitchell, Donna Koskiniemi, Pete Manderfield, Dan Rosemergy

Spirit of the Living God [Call to Prayer]

Pastoral Prayer & Remembrance Ida Elizabeth Thomas, 1899-2000

Offering and *Offertory Anthem: We Bring Our Thanks (Schram)

Doxology

Sermon: **Living God's Love** (Abridged)

I invite you to a time of reflection as we remember the individuals who came to settle at Central and this area. They formed communities and were connected as families, neighbors, mining partners, community organizations, school, church—connections that supported, sustained, and renewed their spirits in what was most often a rough life. God was in the middle of all their connections. They experienced God—as we can—in all these relationships. We are connected by memory, by faith, by love.

Our Contemporary Reading is from *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith* by Kathleen Norris:

...Thomas Merton's [insight] that 'theology really happens in relations between people' was of great use to me when I began to consider, with much fear and trembling, that I would have to join a church. And that my grandmother's Totten's church, just up the street from my house, would have to be it. Because it's where I live, and the Christian faith is best lived out among those who see us without pretensions, in the day-to-day circumstances of life. It was not until years after I had joined that I finally felt I truly belonged there I had begun to comprehend that *the Bible's story is about the relationship of God to human beings, and of human beings to one another, and that this meant that it is our friendships, marriages, families and even church*

congregations that best reveal what kind of theology we have, who our God is. Or, as Thomas Merton once put it, 'Because we love, God is present.' That is the story. (p. 108)

That thought, simple yet profound, captures for me what our faith is about: living God's love in the world. I suggest that is what happened in relationships at Central.

Let me pause to set the stage. I think that God, as Creative Spirit, is love in the midst of our lives and relationships. The God I believe in is not a distant, transcendent God who created and then stepped back, but rather that God created and is creating still in our lives every day, is present in all that is and beyond all that is. We find God in the world.

That truth was beautifully expressed in an article by Hea Sun Kim, son of missionaries in Malaysia, who writes, "I know now that God is experienced more deeply and strongly, not in the empty church building but in the real church—the people—and in the crowded streets, . . . in the struggles of human lives everywhere. God is there. Yes, God chooses to be there." He also reflects that God chose to be in the life of Christ in the places of real people and real life, in real joy and laughter, in real hurt and pain, in real sorrows and tears (*Alive Now*, J/F 1989, p. 59).

That's where Jesus taught and lived out his ministry—with real people in the midst of their lives. Jesus summarized the law by saying that we are called to love God and one another. He demonstrated that love in all that he did, as he reached out to, touched, and cared for all people, including tax collectors, the sick, the poor, the despised. He crossed lines of gender, ethnicity, and religion to create inclusive community where everyone is welcome. And as he lived in that spirit of love, people glimpsed and experienced God—in human relationships. The scripture passage we heard from the Gospel of John describes the way he lived and calls each of us to do the same: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15).

This love is a love that calls us to be for one another and to act for another, even at cost to ourselves. And so it was here at Central. Perhaps they would not have used the word "love" to describe all parts of their lives but that's what they were doing. They loved mining, their families, the school, church, the coronet band and choir, their celebrations. In these relationships they lived God's love. I want to create a collage of those important relationships in a few stories to glimpse the ways they lived and loved.

Marriage and family. While many miners were single, others were married, and others had to leave wives and children behind in the "old country" until they were settled and could bring them to America. The separation was wrenching, captured in the story of Jim Holman and his wife Pol [*Long Winter End*, Newton G. Thomas]. After the mine in Cornwall closes, Jim searches for a future in America, only to learn before he leaves that Pol is pregnant. In Pol's first letter, she writes, "I miss you, Jim. I look down the road for you, the time you used to come from work Be careful in the mine, Jim I pray every day for you, and it look like my prayers be answered so far. I love you." In another letter, "Tell me about your work, Jim, if it is as hard there as it is here Your mother comes by almost every day. Here's a whisper, my dear. We both send our love." Jim works hard and at times is overwhelmed by missing Pol. He begins to save money, buy furniture, and plan for her coming. Her doctor writes to say she's had a son and says, "You must have her come to you soon as you can. Times are still bad." Finally, Jim has the means to bring her and she writes, "I will come. A wife should be with her husband, a boy with his father. I want to be with you." She comes. They create a home and raise their son together. Alfred Nichols captures for all families that joy and meaning: "The homes represented all that home stood for and brought to each heart all the sacredness and reverence embodied in that term." *Experiencing God—the sacred in our relationships—living God's love.*

Friends, Neighbors, Community. A great deal of the miners' time was spent with other miners, forming daily working relationships and community relationships. While some partners barely nodded to each other in the street, others became "inseparable friends on the surface. Some pairs stayed together for years, stayed together until sickness or accident or age parted them" [*Long Winter Ends*] A closeness developed in the miners' relationships, not just the partners but others on your shift. You became dependent on one another. You had to be there for one another, even to risk your life. And the conversations among the miners were colorful and covered the full range of community life. Nichols writes, "It is Monday near lunch hour. Bits of candle boxes serve as seats and back rests. About 20 miners are congregated, among them are stoppers, shaftmen, drifters, trammers, and coppercutters. In other levels may be seen similar groups. Chatter resolved into a sometimes heated discussion of prize fights, choirs, bands, preachers, and affairs civil, political, social, or ecclesiastical" (p. 280). And, of course, pasties and tea are entirely in evidence.

The Boarding House. Such gatherings occurred daily at the boarding houses. Nichols writes, "Ah, the boarding house! How many experiences rich and rare thy walls enfold! . . . The boarding house was there to provide a home for miners young and old, and, incidentally, a night's shelter for the occasional transient. It also served as a rallying center, a rendezvous for the tall-story club, and a lounging place for the carefree. Its doors were never locked and nobody ever knocked" (p. 160). "Here yarns were spun, questions social, political, industrial were cussed and discussed ad liberatum" (p.162). And thus it happened again and again—forming relationships—welcoming all to share in community. *Experiencing God—the sacred in our relationships—living God's love.*

Church. In this midst of all this, the settlers carried on their faith, building this church for worship, religious education, prayer meetings, Epworth and Junior Leagues for the younger girls, grand celebrations of July 4th and Christmas. This was a church but also a community center, a place to meet friends and neighbors, a place to share sorrows and joys, a place to be nurtured and sustained, to experience God. It was in the gathering that they felt less alone, felt connected, that their spirits were lifted. Thomas writes, "The new voices had good company as they sang, and the singing gave them heart's ease they had not known 'til now. They were at home; strangeness had gone, introduction had found its perfection in the blend of their voices" (*Long Winter Ends*, p. 80). In this church, the simple expressions of faith, of community, of love. *Experiencing God—the sacred in our relationships—living God's love.*

Living God's Love Today. How many of us can say the same things about our friends, neighbors, and communities? How many of us can experience God in our relationships? And that we live God's love day to day with all those who are close to us, to all those we meet? I do not want to romanticize Central. Not all residents shared this sense of connectedness. But I am saying that for many at Central, the closeness they felt with family, working partners, neighbors, community, and church was a wonderful gift—and one we are all called to create. It was true then and is true now.

Much of the New Testament is about creating community, loving one another. In Philippians, we are reminded to live God's love in the world in the way of Christ, looking to the interest of others and abiding in Christ's love and spirit. Living like this is a challenge in our fast-paced, mobile, and sometimes fragmented lives. While the challenge may vary depending on circumstances, all of us over time will move in and out of a succession of differing communities based on family, neighborhood, church, work, leisure, and more such interests and commitments that make up the complex network of relationships surrounding us today.

In “Woven Together in Love,” Esther deWaal writes, “the challenge posed by community life, whatever its form, is this: How can I learn to love all these people in a way that they really need to be loved? How can I relate to them in a way that allows me to be fully myself . . . and allows them to be themselves? (*Weavings*, J/A 1988, p. 7).

The answer starts with the affirmation that we are all children of God, each of us yearning to be loved, accepted, and affirmed; and then to recognize that God loves, accepts, and affirms us in and through our relationships and communities. If we believe that—and I do—it becomes absolutely necessary to work on our relationships and building our communities. Parker Palmer writes, “We need to help one another build community where we are . . . We need to foster the diverse forms of community which are needed if our urban, technological society is to recover its human roots” (*Alive Now*, M/J 1990, p. 47). I challenge each of us to do that, wherever we live. It will make all the difference.

There’s an insightful *Peanuts* cartoon. Lucy is walking with Charlie Brown; Snoopy is following behind and listening. Lucy says, “Sooner or later, Charlie Brown, there’s one thing you’re going to have to learn. . . You reap what you sow! You get out of life exactly what you put into it! No more and no less!” Snoopy stops to ponder this, then walks away thinking, “I’d kind of like to see a little more margin for error!” Well, there is “a little more margin of error” because we’re human and God continues to call us to be all that we can be, to keep trying, to help create shalom communities in whatever ways we can.

As Thomas Merton put it, “Because we love, God is present.” That is our story. Amen.

Hymn: In Christ There Is No East or West

Benediction, Response, Postlude

Organist: Mark Spreitzer

***Choir Members:** *Sopranos:* Susan Adams, Donna Koskiniemi, Valerie Koskiniemi, Pat Mitchell, Sharon Strieter, Ann Jarvis Tomlinson

Altos: Carol Bard, Dorothy Kemp, Connie Martin Meyer, Deanna Martin, Theresa Rekawek

Tenors: Norman Everett, Andrew Fountaine, Peter Manderfield, Stanley Martin, Mark Spreitzer

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

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