

106th Annual Reunion Service, Central Mine Methodist Church – July 29, 2012

Minister: Rev. Dr. Daniel Rosemergy

***Introit** The Central Introit (Glenna Slatterley Irwin)

Greetings & Announcements: Lynn C. Bryant

A Moment of Remembrance and Thanksgiving: Ruth (Mitchell) Maynard, 1908-2011
Margaret Jane (Bryant) Wake, 1918-2012

Hymn: All Creatures of Our God and King

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

A Time with Children/Youth [Kazoos, Saffron Bread, Copper Ore]

***Anthem:** For the Beauty of the Earth (John Rutter)

Responsive Reading: 3rd Sunday 2nd Reading – “The Eternal Presence

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

Scripture Readings: Exodus 3:1-6 “Holy Ground”; Selected New Testament Passages “Sacred Moments”

Special Music: I've Got Peace Like a River
Carolyn Meyer, Deanna Martin, Pete Manderfield, Dan Rosemergy

Pastoral Prayer

Offering and *Offertory Anthem: Simple Gifts from God (Williams/Martin)

Doxology

Sermon: **The Sacred Ordinary** (Abridged)

As many times as I've been here for these Reunion Services, I never lose the thrill of experiencing this hillside coming alive, hearing the bell calling us to gather for worship, and sensing again the awe at the way in which this gathering connects us with those who lived and worked here, and which beckons us to carry on the tradition and to live our faith in today's world.

In his autobiography *The Story of My Life*, Alfred Nichols recalls the Reunion Services: “As I sit in the choir and listen to the strong, soulful singing of hymns, my heart is strangely touched. In my memory, I hear the voices of some of my old pals, and I wonder, oh, I wonder, if it is possible any of those old patriarchs, long since passed on, could possibly be listening in. How charmingly simple is that sacred sense, how divinely good” (pp. 96-97 from abridged version appearing in *Recollection—Life in the Keweenaw*, R. Charles Stetter & Alfred Nichols).

This sacred moment is with me throughout the year. It's central to my sense of *the sacred in the ordinary*. Last summer I read Sue Monk Kidd's *Firstlight* as part of my morning reflection time. In the chapter “The Sacred Ordinary” (now you know my sermon title is not original), she writes, “The most significant gifts are often the ones most easily overlooked. Small, everyday blessings: woods, health, music, laughter, memories, books, family, friends, second chances, warm fireplaces, and all the

footprints scattered through our days” (p. 113). This insight grew out of remembering a family outing with her husband and children fishing on a muggy afternoon, when everything seemed unpleasant to her. “Looking for an escape, I wandered back along the same path and found my attention drawn to the footprints etched in the dust.” She sees the prints of her husband’s tennis shoes, her own sandals, her kids’ bare feet: “A wash of unexpected gratitude poured over me—for growing feet and the sharing of lives together” (p. 113). The sacred ordinary!

Kidd refers to this kind of experience as “firstlight”—moments of quickening when the knowledge of a mysterious, unseen inner life flames up. For as long as she can remember, she has reflected on the workings of her soul and her search for meaning in things great and minuscule. She reflects on a time when she was experiencing a kind of “religious burnout” and went to a retreat center to “taste silence and solitude, to pray contemplatively, to brush against deep, intoxicating mysteries” (p. 95) She encountered there “the inner Beloved” (p. 96). But, she says, “I came home to grocery shopping and children and bills and work and phone calls. Plain old life. It was startling in its incongruence. Here in the noise of life there was mostly God’s supreme absence” (p. 96).

On Monday, Kidd decided to drive to her church. It was locked but the custodian let her in saying, “Church was yesterday.” She sat in the sanctuary but with the vacuum whining in the corridor, the place didn’t seem very sacred. “Where was God? Longing rose in me.” She knew she had to settle one thing: “If I am intent on centering my life in the presence of God, then I must understand what I believe about where this presence can be found. Had I limited God’s presence to what I perceived as sacred—to holy places and church-sponsored moments? Had I assumed the material world was more or less empty of God? Had I separated common things from spiritual things, and routine moments from holy moments?” (pp. 96-97).

Kidd said at that moment she began to heal her own “deeply carved duality.” She opened herself to God’s presence in the ordinary happenings of her life. She recalls being at the seashore watching a line of pelicans swoop low over the water and recalled the Bible verse, “If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me.” She writes, “*Even there!* I am sustained by the belief that God is available, at any moment, that no matter how deep or shallow my need is, I am never beyond divine guidance” (p. 110).

Regrettably, I think that a “deeply carved duality” separating the sacred from the ordinary, the holy from the mundane, is very much a part of our society today. Over time, *we have allowed the separation of the holy from our daily lives*, and in the process, we have narrowed our understanding of the sacred. There is a common perception, and for many a lived reality, that the “holy” is found *only* in our places of worship on the weekends, and it’s there that we touch the sacred. That troubles me. God’s presence is not limited to the sanctuary but is very much in and is a part of our lives all the time. For me, the *sacred* is the awareness of the creative spirit of life within each of us.

I want to be clear that I’m not saying that the “gathered church at worship” is not important. It is! We need our places of worship to gather as caring communities, to sing and give voice to our gratitude for creation and for our lives, to confess our humanness, to hear the Word and to reflect on its meaning for our lives, and to respond and recommit ourselves to living our faith in the world. But some go to worship and leave the sanctuary and live their week day lives as if they had never been to worship.

The “scattered church” is equally important—people of faith living their faith in the world, building a just, peaceful community. If the “gathered” or “scattered” church is to be real, we need to first bring the spirit and presence of God with us. Liturgy is “the work of the people.” Yet many don’t come ready to

worship, expecting to experience the sacred in deeper, more meaningful ways. If there is not a deep sense of the presence of God with you each moment wherever you are, the “scattered church” simply won’t happen.

Holy Ground. The story of Moses and the burning bush is a foundation of this reflection on the “sacred ordinary”—the call of God to Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, the sudden appearance of the burning bush, and God’s call, “Moses! Moses!” Moses said, “Here am I” and God said, “Do not come near, put off your shoes from your feet, for *the place you are standing is holy ground.*” Moses was reluctant to follow God’s command but is finally persuaded by God’s assurance, “I will be with you.” Two things are central to this reflection on the “sacred ordinary”—God’s statement that Moses is standing on holy ground, and the assurance that God will be with Moses always. Now hear *God’s proclamation* directed to you: *The place you are standing is holy ground. Wherever you are, that place will be holy ground. Wherever you are, I will be with you.*

Not a day goes by that I don’t start the day with an affirmation of the presence of God’s creative spirit in my life, and an awareness that wherever I go that day, it is *holy ground*. Once you believe that and live that, you find that you are open to realizing that everything that happens—conversations, work, play, worship—is the sacred ordinary.

Scriptures. When you think about the scriptures and the writings of the early Christian communities, while there are many important passages on the Temple in Jerusalem, synagogues, and house churches, many, if not most, of the important faith stories occur in the course of people’s lives day by day. The stories of Jesus and his followers are found near the Sea of Galilee, in the countryside, in people’s homes—all filled with the sense of the sacred, the presence of God. The call to Moses is echoed in Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan: “And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove . . . and a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my son, the Beloved with whom I am well pleased.’” Jesus walked on “holy ground” throughout his ministry and near the end of his earthly life, he prayed that that spirit, the spirit of truth (another Counselor) will be with us forever.

Central. To read Nichols’ *More Copper Country Tales* is to be struck with the way that the Central miners and their families lived their faith throughout the week—certainly in the church, but also in the mine shaft, the school house, during choir or Cornet Band rehearsals. This place was holy ground. There was an awareness of the presence of God on this hillside and in their lives.

I invite us all to consider three simple guides to living with the sacred ordinary, to sense the sacred in the happenings of your lives, to be aware of God’s presence and confident that wherever you are, you stand on holy ground: (a) broaden and redefine the sacred, (b) open yourself to the sacred all around you, (c) create sacred moments.

Broaden and Redefine the Sacred. In *Where in the World Is God?* Robert Brizee writes, “I think of God as constantly present with me, not as one who intervenes once in a while. I may feel alone, but I do not think of myself as alone. I know that God is in the tiny and ordinary events of my daily living, not just the major crossroads.” That was the promise God made to Moses: “I will be with you.” And that is the constant awareness of Jesus: “You are my Beloved.” The moment you believe that is the moment your life changes.

Open Yourself to the Sacred All Around You. The many stories of Jesus’ life—wanderings, encounters, teaching—are deeply moving as Jesus evoked the sacred in all things—feeding the 4000, Jesus and Zacchaeus, the wedding at Cana—all the sacred ordinary, in everyday, common places. In *Long Winter*

Ends, for the miner Bob Allen, “Religion was a thing of the open fields, the woods, the seasons, a thing to which a house, a ceremony, bells were not essential. Religion was a garment of happiness to wrap about duty, justice, honor” (p. 170). Are you open to the sacred around you?

Create Sacred Moments. There are times when it is important to pause, to create spiritual moments that can refresh and renew. Jesus often went apart to be alone, to mediate, to pray, to speak with God. Often a hike, a walk into the woods, can be a special spiritual moment. In *Long Winter Ends*, Holman and Allen take a Sunday to walk into the woods: “They crossed the clearing to the water, where a large flat stone lay unshaded in the sun . . . They stood gazing into the water. Here the waves and falls and sprays of the upper course of the stream rested . . . Peace was in the air of the place, and a quiet that reached the innermost depths of a man, that made [them] aware of the immensities that dwelt beyond the rim of [the universe] , yet touched the world. Allen, without raising his eyes, in a voice low but clear, said, ‘He leadeth me beside the still waters.’” A sacred moment. We all need to be led beside the still waters.

Each of us will find our own way, but we must all believe and live in confidence that we stand on holy ground and that God is with us, each moment of every day. Each moment can be sacred if we let it be.

Hymn: Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing

Benediction

Response: God Be With You Til We Meet Again

Organist: Father Corbin Eddy

Choir Director: Glenna Slatterley Irwin

***Choir Members:** *Sopranos:* Carol Bard, Joanne Bollinger, Tacy Flint, Charlene Marculis, Carolyn Meyer

Altos: Connie Martin, Deanna Martin, Marcia Mason, Lani Poynter

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

Basses: James Irwin, Jay Martin, Graham Meyer, Jack Porritt, Rodney Westlake

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