

## 2010 MAY16 OUR METHODIST HERITAGE

**John 20:10-18**

**"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him"  
(Jn.20:13).**

The scripture text I have chosen seems more like Easter than Heritage Sunday,  
But you will see its relevance on this Heritage Sunday  
As we celebrate the birthday and the history of the United Methodist Church

One of the saddest things in ministry was to watch  
One of our members who diagnosed with a dementia, slowly deteriorate.  
At first she suffered with severe headaches.  
Then she lost her memory,  
She forgot her children.  
Then she forgot her husband.  
She continued to descend into this pit until she experienced  
the most painful loss of all.  
She forgot who she was.

There are few things worse or more frightening,  
than forgetting who you are.  
You cannot recall where you belong.  
You forget your past and you do not know your future.  
Remembering is life.  
It is connecting to others, community, and to God our creator.

**Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come  
and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"  
Ecclesiasters 12:1**

This year we celebrate 225 years as a United Methodist church in American.  
Dr. Riley Case in his Article "Happenings Around the Church"  
Said the Methodist church in Baltimore 1784  
asked the question that John Wesley asked  
At the first Methodist Conference in London in 1744.

**What may we reasonably believe to be God's design,  
in raising up the preachers called Methodists?**

The response was the same in America as in London.

**To reform the nation, more particularly the Church; and  
To spread scriptural holiness over the land.**

At birthday we usually get gifts.  
The one gift I remember getting as a young farm boy  
Was a pair of pliers.  
Dad got me a little one to fit my hand  
and then drilled a hole in the handle  
And put a eyelet in it so I could put a cord around it  
And not lose it.  
It was a great day for me.  
Because the pliers represented being a farmer.  
Dad was saying to me: You are now to be a partner farmer with me.  
I would not be caught anywhere without that pliers

I would only take it off to go to bed.  
 If I could I would have attached it to my pajamas  
 I'm sure it went thru the laundry several time  
 Much to the chagrin of my mother and the old washing machine.  
 It was my tool of manhood.

Well the greatest gift the circuit riders and founding fathers and mothers  
 Gave the New American Methodist church.  
 Was to believe that this church and this nation  
 Was born of God.  
 And that America was the New Israel.  
 put into place by God himself.

Now the operating mentality of the evangelical Christians of  
 the early 1800 Methodist was post-millennialism,  
 They believed that the world was being redeemed.  
 And they would see God's kingdom on earth.  
 And the way to achieve this was by bringing sinners to repentance.

**Revival began to break out in the new world.**

**George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards,  
 Found the Spirit moving and**

He reported five or six people converted.  
 One a young woman whom he wrote,  
 "She had been one of the greatest company keepers in the whole town."  
 He feared her conversion would douse the flame,  
 But quite the opposite took place,  
 300 souls converted in six months in a town of only 1,100.  
 The news spread like wildfire,  
 And similar revivals broke out in over 100 towns  
 By 1850 the nations population was 23 million people,  
 And over 3 million were church members.

Social reform went hand in hand with revival.  
 The church moved forward with  
 Pro-equality –for- women,  
 Pro temperance, Anti war, and Anti Slavery.

But many people got disgusted because  
 They wanted to see some quick change.  
 They saw that the church leaders and Bishops were dragging their feet.  
 Just as too often we see it still happening today.

Along came the Civil War which put a sever damper  
 On the millennial vision of God's glory on earth.  
 With over 625,000 dead, many person flipped and became pre-millennialists.  
 Which now meant that the world  
 Was getting worse and could only be redeemed by the  
 literal 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ.”.

This moved the church's purpose and goal

From reforming the nation,  
 To social reform of rescuing individuals  
 from the destruction of this world.  
 And many Methodist leaders turned to advancing science,  
 Through modernization and industrial revolution  
 They saw the world was getting better through  
 Education and not revivalism.  
 And capitalism was a part of the equation.

In 1907 a new social reformist group.  
 Methodist Federated for Social Service. MFSA  
 Drafted a social creed which was know as the social gospel.  
 The creed stressed equal rights for all,  
 Justice, abolition of child labor,  
 And causes that hardly seem controversial today.  
 Evil was no longer linked with  
 original sin and the human heart  
 but with the unjust structures of society.

Sadly, now the church moved not to save men, but social orders.  
 The poor, underprivileged, the helpless.  
 Good thing in themselves,  
 but far from the saving of souls.  
 It is exactly what Paul warned the Ephesians about.

**Ephesians 2:11-12 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles...  
 And at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel  
 and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the  
 world.**

**Like Mary many Methodist cried out:**

**"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him"  
 (Jn.20:13).**

To make matter worse the 1908 General conference.  
 Moved to delete reference to original sin from the Baptismal ritual.  
 This would have been heresy to the early apostles.  
 To take it a step further,  
 in 1912 the General conference designated MFSA  
 as the official social conscience of the church.

**Dr. David Jeremiah said that he believed that there were special, hotter places in  
 Hell for pastors and people who taught a false gospel...I think that  
 Jesus and Paul prove him right.**

**Mark 8:18 Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you  
 remember?**

This great church moved from reforming the nation through conversion,  
 To changing of society through social reforms.  
 And the opinions of the common person was left behind  
 For the chosen few bishops and seminary professors.  
 Who moved us to a social Gospel.

Even little children know what Liberal Bishops forgot.

**Take the old story of the four year old was at the pediatrician for a check up.**

The doctor looked down her ears and said: "Do you think I'll find Big Bird in here?"  
Then the doctor looked down her throat and said: "Do you think I'll find the Cookie Monster down there?" Then he put the stethoscope to her chest and as he listened to heart beat asked: "Do you think I'll hear Barney in there?" Finally the little girl spoke up. Oh no---"Jesus is in my heart. Barney's on my underpants."

Children know it is Jesus who must be in the heart.

But Social change did not bring the peace and reform they expected in America.

The kingdom seemed far way.

Now the church identified Evil with capitalism  
and the profit motive.

Not the human heart.

And the many Church leaders and Bishops watched with great interest

The Soviet Union's effort to redo the economic system through communism

American was no longer the city on the hill.

But part of the world problem.

And capitalism was the enemy.

What happened in the church was that the liberal leadership,  
Was miles away from the common Bible believing Methodist  
Who filled the church pews every Sunday.

SLIDE----It was not until 1944

after it became know that Hitler had killed 6 million Jews  
And the war had been supported by almost all Americas  
That the Methodist General Conference passed a statement  
that the war might be justified in some circumstances.

**Oh We as the church must beware that we**

**Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth... (Deut. 8:17-18).**

**People began to leave the Methodist church in droves.**

**They were saying:**

**SLIDE----"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him" (Jn.20:13).**

So in 1968 there was an attempt to solved the membership loss by merger.

SLIDE----there was a move to unite the Evangelical United Brethren Church.

With the Methodist Church.

So forty two years ago.

In 1968 while the Apollo astronauts circled the moon for the first time,

The musical "Hair" premiered on Broadway,

"2001, A Space Odyssey" was playing at the movies,

The Vietnam Mi Lei massacre happened,

the Democratic Convention turned into a riot,

Bobby Kennedy was shot and  
 I was ordained a Deacon in the Evangelical United Brethren Church,  
 Soon to become The United Methodist Church.  
 I graduated from Westmar college in LeMars Iows,  
 Got married,  
 And Headed for Asbury Theological Seminary,  
 In Wilmore Kentucky.

SLIDE ---That summer in May the Methodists and the Evangelical United Brethren  
 formed a new Church, called the United Methodists Church.  
 The EUBs were supposed to bring a renewed fever and evangelistic purpose  
 to the stuffy old Methodists.  
 The Methodists would provide the stability and financial security that comes with size.

But dreams and reality don't always mesh as they should  
 In spite of our prayers and speeches and the promise 1968 Dallas Convention,  
 Just ten years after that union,  
 The new Umchurch had lost more members than  
 Than they had gain in total from the EUB Church.  
 We went from 11.5 million members to less than 8 million and subtracting.

But our leadership was not discouraged.  
 Because we are still the second largest Protestant denomination in America  
 What we all know that is only because the other denominations  
 were declining as fast as we were.  
 Mary words were fast becoming our words  
**They had taken away my lord and I don't know where they have place him.**

SLIDE---So, you ask, as Wesley's hymn asks,  
**"Are we yet alive."**  
 We sing that hymn every year as we meet for Annual Conference.

Friends, the good news is that The UMC is still alive.  
 And it is still a vital plan in Gods hands.  
 Because God is not done with us yet,  
**Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the  
 salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."**

The church is made up of people.  
 And there is no person who is perfect.  
 There is no church that is perfect,  
 But God can use us.  
 If it is going to take place there are some things we must recognize.  
**First** of all we are no longer a  
 Political, economic or even social force in our world today.  
 We don't have the clout anymore,  
**Second:** People are not going to flock to us because of our brand name;  
 we aren't Coca Cola.  
 We are a ford in a world dominated by Toyota Prism.

**Third:** But what we do have is a historic tradition Grounded in Scriptural holiness.

We have 25 articles of faith that were handed down to us  
by our forefathers that still guides us today.

The Hope for the UMC is grounded in this

**1. Those Articles of faith show us that**

God can change a person heart.

He can transform the human mind.

Just this week Our Youth pastor led a youth to Jesus,

And he put a new song in the heart.

**Some say the biggest threat facing the church is radical Islam**

But the Bible says it is radical self-righteousness, pride

And sin in the human heart.

SLIDE-----2. This UMchurch is still a safe place for parents to bring the children

When life is hard and they're looking for a better way.

The UMchurch is still a safe place where unchurch parents,

In the midst of distress, flood and fire, earthquake and volcanic eruption,

Can find the church being their with hope and help,

Clothing and shelter.

3. The UMC is still here with an unparalleled opportunity to

increase the ministry and vision of God and to bring revival to America.

I know that a revival in the UMC will result in a revival in the United States.

The battle is not over.

**In 480 B.C. a small band of soldiers maybe 2000 strong Led by 300 Spartans**

Sought to defend Greece and freedom at Thermopylae

Historians say the enemy Persian army was so large that the ground shook

When they marched and they drank rivers dry.

And estimate of 200,000 to 1 million soldiers.

The Spartans fought to the last man.

When their swords were gone,

They fought on with their hands and teeth.

On the day of the final battle they stopped a traveler

And sent home this stirring message

That has become their epitaph.

**“Stranger, tell the Spartans that we behaved as they would wish us to, and are buried here.”**

I wonder will it be said of the followers of Jesus Christ today and

Of our United Methodist church in Aberdeen.

**“Tell our Lord that we have behaved as he would wish us to behave, and we are buried here.”**

We can wish we lived in better times, in easier time,

But we do not.

If the Gospel is to prosper in our society and in our church

Battles must be fought and God's people must be faithful.

And you and I must speak up and

act as our Lord would have us act and leave a better future for those who follow.

Sometimes the best way forward is remembering from where we come.

We have a great heritage and a promising future.