

Reunion Sunday
September 15, 2019

What lies at the edge of the known world? For all of history, people have feared the unknown. During Roman times and extending into medieval times, map makers would use the phrase "Here are Lions" to mark areas of unexplored territories on maps. During medieval times, distant and unexplored lands on the edges of maps were marked by drawings of dragons, sea serpents, and other ominous looking fictional animals. The notation of dangerous beasts and mythical sea creatures invoked the harm that sailors feared to encounter when entering previously uncharted waters. We heard today, how in the Book of Numbers, the Hebrew explorers who Moses sent out came back with the report, "Here there be giants!" Even though the country was bountiful, flowing with milk and honey, they were afraid of the unknown.

It was during the summer of 1839 that the first settlers, Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Wilcox and their four children, came to Waupun. It was a beautiful country that greeted them. There was luxuriant vegetation, wild flowers of every shade and color wherever you chance to look. Tall prairie grass on the open spaces with a background of virgin timber of oak, ash, hickory and elm formed a beautiful canopy of leaves - a temple of God.

Little wonder that men and women who caught the vision of its loveliness and its possibilities for the future, in spite of the unknown, decided to make this their home. Soon others came: sturdy men and women, willing to share their lot with others more or less fortunate than they. Ready to help work out for themselves such laws of good society as are implied in Thrift, Honor and a Religion satisfactory to their own ideals. These people with thankfulness to God in their hearts for the many blessings they had received, and, believing that it was good for people to meet together for praise and prayer, for the knowledge gained in public service, and for the religious training of their children, organized the first class of what is now known as the Waupun United Methodist Church.

In the fall of 1844, Silas Miller, his wife, Eunice, their sons, Ezekiel and Wesson, and their son-in-law and daughter, Henry and Melvina

Hillyer, residents of the western part of the village commonly known as "upper town," held the organizational meeting of the first class.

A short time after the class was formed, Rev. Samuel Smith and his family moved to Waupun. Rev. Smith was a circuit rider, who was noted for his ability to quote Scripture: giving book, chapter and verse. He had preached the first sermon in the Seymour Wilcox home as early as 1840. Rev. Smith assumed charge of the meetings, which were held in his log cabin. He brought with him several families with whom he had contact as a circuit rider, so the group continued to grow.

In the last 175 years, those first believers continued to grow into what we know now as the Waupun United Methodist Church. Over the years, the people of the Waupun United Methodist Church have continued, in spite of the lions, the dragons, and the giants to settle the land and practice their faith and invite others to share the bounty that God has given. There have been, not giants to be feared, but giants of opportunity to share the good news of God.

Over the years, circuit riders like the Rev. Samuel Smith have preached sermons and led their Congregations toward the land of bounty. Today, we have two returning circuit riders who have pastored this Church and who share their thoughts and memories of their time here. (*The Rev. Clyde Cross and the Rev. Paul Yoder speak.*)

By 1850 Silas Miller and most of his family had moved on to Winneconne where he pursued his trade of lumbering. However, Wesson Miller was ordained and followed Rev. Samuel Smith in serving this congregation in 1845. Some twenty years later, Wesson Miller became "presiding elder" or District Superintendent of the Fond du Lac area. In his book, "Thirty Years in Itinerancy," he wrote of the Wisconsin Conference meeting of October 4, 1856. "I visited Waupun soon after my appointment as Presiding Elder of the Fond du Lac District. Many changes had taken place during the twenty years that had intervened since my pastorate there in 1843. I found a small frame church and one of the best parsonages in the Conference. The society had become strong, both financially and in numbers."

Many “presiding elders” or District Superintendents have visited and served this area since Wesson Miller. Today we have our current District Superintendent, the Rev. Kate Jones, with us. How does she find the Waupun United Methodist Church? (*The Rev. Kate Jones shares her thoughts.*)

You have heard the names of the clergy over the years, Rev. Samuel Smith, Rev. Clyde Cross, Rev. Paul Yoder, District Superintendents Wesson Miller and Kate Jones, but you also heard the names of Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Wilcox, Silas and Eunice Miller, Ezekiel and Wesson, Henry and Melvina Hillyer. It is not just clergy who have planted and grown this Church, it has been sturdy men and women, willing to share their lot with others more or less fortunate than they, people like you who, with thankfulness to God in their hearts for the many blessings they had received, have shared their faith and worked to build a church of God in this place.

Each of you have been given a stone this morning. Each of you are a living stone that is part of a living and growing church. Each of you has played a part in leaving a legacy for the good and faithful people who will come after you.

The contemporary Christian singer, Steve Green, has given us a song, Find Us Faithful, in which he sings of the gifts we leave behind. During this song, I invite you to hold your stone, reflect on some memory and some legacy you have left behind and mark that stone with one of the markers near you. Sometime today, before you leave, place that stone somewhere on the property, maybe you'll find it again the next time you come or maybe someone else will find it and give thanks for what you have left behind and that will, in turn, inspire them to be faithful.

We're pilgrims on the journey
Of the narrow road
And those who've gone before us line the way
Cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary
Their lives a stirring testament to God's sustaining grace

Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses
Let us run the race not only for the prize

But as those who've gone before us
Let us leave to those behind us
The heritage of faithfulness passed on through godly lives

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful
May the fire of our devotion light their way
May the footprints that we leave
Lead them to believe
And the lives we live inspire them to obey
Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful

After all our hopes and dreams have come and gone
And our children sift through all we've left behind
May the clues that they discover and the memories they uncover
Become the light that leads them to the road we each must find

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful
May the fire of our devotion light their way
May the footprints that we leave
Lead them to believe
And the lives we live inspire them to obey

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful
May the fire of our devotion light their way
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