

WGUMC October 6, 2013 Welcoming the Past
Matthew 6:19-21 and Luke 22:10-14

With school out this past week, we took the opportunity to get out of town on Monday. Shut out of Yosemite on Tuesday, we took a hike, explored Mono Lake and then went to the little ghost town of Bodie. It was late in the day, but I wanted to get a photo of the old Methodist Church there. It was built for Cornish miners in 1882.

Ministry in a mining town was a challenge. Ten thousand people, one Protestant church, and 65 saloons! The town was notorious for being a "sea of sin." One little girl who was traveling there with her family wrote in her diary, "Goodbye God, I'm going to Bodie."

Looking into that dilapidated old church in those high hills with the 100-mile-an-hour winds, I thought about the people who worshiped there and the lives they lived and the sacrifices they made and the risks they took and the gifts they gave to

be the Body of Christ in a sea of sin. And it reminded me that being the Body of Christ will cost you, no matter where you are.

Today, there are no living Christians in Bodie, only ghosts, but there are Christians living in Iraq, in Syria, in Egypt—places where being a member of the Body of Christ can get you killed. Like the hardy Methodists of Bodie, their strength gives us courage. Their perseverance gives us hope. And their willingness to give their lives for their faith reminds us of the one who gave his life for us, the one who said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

It's World Communion Sunday and a good day to acknowledge what Christians around the world have taught us about the meaning of "Do this." I used to think that those words were instructions about gathering frequently and reverently around the Lord's Table, about taking bread and wine and reflecting on Jesus' sacrifice for us. We do this because this is how Christ becomes Present with a capital "P"

for us. And making Christ Present in a godforsaken world and in our sometime godforsaken lives is pretty important business.

But after my trip to Bodie and as I listened to these words at our Bible class on Thursday night, I heard something more.

"This is my body, which is *given* for you. Do *this* in remembrance of me." What Jesus was saying to me is, "Do what I do. And what I do is give my life for you. So what I want you to do is to give your life for others. This is the best way to remember me."

Now this changes things for me. So coming to the communion table to be in the presence of Christ and to receive the gift of life is only the first step in remembering Jesus.

Leaving the communion table to go and give life to others is the necessary next step. The truth is that we won't know how to take that step unless we look to those who have gone before us and get help from those who walk beside us.

Fortunately, we don't have to go to Bodie or to Baghdad to find them. There have been many souls who have gathered right here around this table in years past and who remembered Jesus by giving their lives and sharing his love with us. And there are those who remembered Jesus by dying and leaving a legacy of love so that there would be resources for future generations to keep gathering around this table to remember Jesus. Today, we remember them.

Today we welcome our past as a gift. Willow Glen Methodist Church started out as a Sunday School in the 1860's. A building on Lincoln Avenue was built for worship in 1870. The first regularly appointed pastor arrived in 1874. That makes next year the 140th anniversary of Willow Glen UMC. There have been 40 pastors in that time, and I'm sure that all of them, by the grace of God and to the best of their ability, gave their lives to this church. But what about the people who didn't get paid to "do this in remembrance" of Jesus? What

about the folks who filled the pews? Their giving was even more amazing.

Jesus says, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...." And many church members over the years took those words to heart and stored their treasures in this congregation so that we might bring heaven a little closer to earth. If you think about the church as the beta version of the kingdom of God, then you can see that giving your treasures to the church is a sure way of storing them in heaven. As you know, you can't take it with you, but if you give it to God, it will get there all the same!

Do you want to know one big reason this church survived the Great Recession? Estate giving. Willow Glen is in better shape than many churches because the faithful here have remembered Jesus by remembering the church in their wills. And so unexpected and very generous gifts came at just the

right time to keep ministries going and to keep our youth and children's programs growing. God is good. All the time.

But that raises some questions for the rest of us: have we remembered Jesus in our wills? Have we thought about how we can leave a legacy of love that will give life to others in Jesus' name? Have we considered how we can share our faith with our family not only in our life but also in our death? A word of advice: don't count on your kids to remember Jesus with your money. If you want them to do this in remembrance of Jesus, write it down.

One of those unexpected and most generous gifts came this last year from Wayne and Virginia Ritchie's estate. After remembering Jesus by giving their lives to others, by volunteering thousands of hours to Contact Crisis Line during their life, Wayne and Virginia remembered Jesus by tithing their assets to the church after their death. Because they did this in

remembrance of Jesus, we have been able to begin renovations of Kohlstedt Hall and repayment of the Woodhaven debt.

The renovations of the hall should be completed by our 140th anniversary. So I got the idea that we could use the occasion to rename the hall after Wayne and Virginia.

First, I did some research on the person behind the Kohlstedt name. The hall was named after Dr. Kohlstedt back in 1948, "in appreciation of his fine Christian spirit, his helpfulness in our program, his generous contributions of time and means and counsel towards making our building campaign a success." [quoted from a church newsletter, February 1948] But Dr. Kohlstedt was not a member of this church. He was a member of Palo Alto First UMC, and there is a hall named for him there. I couldn't find any family connection here, and no one I've talked to remembers much about him.

So, after honoring his gift for 65 years, it seems fitting to rename the hall after two of our own members, people we have

loved and want to remember for giving their lives for others in ways that still inspire us to give. How does Ritchie Hall sound? I'm telling you this now because we will take a vote at our church conference on November 17th, and I want us to have plenty of time to think and pray and talk about it. The Mission Possible Team is all for it.

Naming a space in someone's honor is one way to remember those whose lives help us remember Jesus. There is no other good reason to do this. We only remember them so that we can remember him. That's why the Methodists gathered in Bodie, why they gather in Bagdad, and why we gather here in Willow Glen: to give to others what Christ has given to us. Let's do this in remembrance of him.