

YOUTH SUNDAY MESSAGE 2018

Introduction: As we were preparing for this Youth Sunday service and tossing around ideas for our message of how we are all connected through God, we decided to look at our history as Presbyterians to see when and if we, as a church, had worked in the name of Jesus to take a stand on issues of inequality and injustice. If we believe that we are “different but united through God” where is the proof in our actions? To share with you what we have learned, we now turn to our roving reporter on the street, Emma Poole, who will be interviewing some folks with knowledge of our history, both recent and not so recent, as Presbyterians. And please note that we have taken a few liberties with our identities! Aileen is a pretty awesome high school student, but she hasn’t really been ordained...yet! Take it away Emma!

Emma: Hi there and welcome to our “person on the street interviews! I’d like you all to meet Kamryn Wilson. Kamryn, I hear that you quite the expert on WWII and how the confessing church was part of resisting the Nazi party in Germany. What can you tell us about that?

Kamryn: Well, Emma, it was January of 1933 when Adolph Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany. By playing on people’s fears, he was able to give himself enough power to abolish all political rights and democratic processes. He even outlawed all political parties but his own and put into practice a system of terrorizing Jews which led to what we know as the Holocaust. Millions of people died. It was an abomination!

Emma: It was indeed unspeakable! Did the church have a response to this horrible act?

Kamryn: You bet. In 1934, a group of folks from a bunch of different denominations, including theologian Karl Barth, put together a bunch of representatives and asked them to put together a declaration to publicly stand against the hatred and false doctrine that was being supported by Hitler at that time. This doctrine, which proclaims the church's freedom in Jesus Christ, became known as "The Theological Declaration of Barmen", and was adopted without a single amendment.

Emma: Wow. What else can you tell us about it?

Kamryn: Well, if you happen to look in the Book of Confessions, which happens to be Part I of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), you will find this declaration in its' entirety as one of the significant pieces of our history.

Emma: So, even though the Jews who were being terrorized and murdered were of a different faith background, folks in the church thought it was their job to stand up for them?

Kamryn: Absolutely. We believe that ALL people should be treated with dignity and justice. It isn't up to us to decide who is worthy- we are simply all human beings. Do you see the banner that happens to be hanging up there? The one with the swastika on it?

Emma:: I do- that is a really unsettling image! Why would we hang a swastika in our church??

Kamryn: Well, if you look at it closely, you will notice that the swastika is crossed out. This banner represents the Declaration of Barmen and stands as a witness against the tyranny of Hitler and protested any effort for the Nazis to take control of the church. The flames represent the death and destruction of the Holocaust. Some of the signers of the declaration were even killed, but the cross at the bottom, rising from the flames, shows that our faith survives all persecution.

Emma: It doesn't look so scary, now that you have explained it! Thanks for your time, Kamryn!

Kamryn: Any time!

Emma: Wow, that was some powerful information! I wonder who else we might bump into...hey, there's my friend Pastor Aileen! How are you pastor?

Pastor Aileen: I'm great! How are you?

Emma: Fabulous! Hey, it just dawned on me- you are a pastor...and you are a woman! It would be easy to assume that women have always had the same opportunities as men to become clergy people, but I wonder...has that always been the case?

Pastor Aileen: No, it has not always been the case. There was a time when it was inconceivable that a woman could actually pastor a congregation, but we actually have a pretty long history. There were even some women in the earlier factions of the Presbyterian church who took pastoral positions in the late 1800's and early 1900's! Louisa Woosley is the very first woman minister of record from an American Presbyterian denomination. From the time she was 12 years old, she felt called to preach, but at that time women just did not become ministers. She later married a man and hopes he would become a minister so she could at least be a minister's wife, but that never happened. She finally got her chance in 1887, when the pastor never showed up to preach and she was asked to fill in. She went on to become ordained in 1889 and preached 912 sermons!

Emma: Seriously?

Pastor Aileen: Yes, indeed! And the first women to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA) was Margaret Ellen Towner, in October of 1956. That was a long time ago. In 1955, the PC(USA) voted to begin ordaining women as ministers. Margaret served several churches in several states during her time as a pastor. Hey, I bet you didn't know I have some really cool history on this topic in my very own family!

Emma: Really? Tell me about it!

Pastor Aileen: Well, my grandma Jane was one of the very first women ordained as a pastor in this presbytery. That was way back in ____ In fact, she even served this very church as an educator before she was ordained! And she served on the staff of a bunch of different churches as well as the presbytery itself.

Emma: Wow! That is pretty cool- I bet she has told you some great stories about being a pastor!

Pastor Aileen: She sure has. She has done more things than I can even remember. She is a very special lady...and a pretty great Grandma too.

Emma: Thanks, Pastor Aileen! See you in church

Pastor Aileen: I certainly hope so, Reporter!!

Emma: Wow, I am learning so much! I wonder who else we might find to share some history with us...

Michael: Excuse me, what are you doing there with that microphone?

Emma: I'm trying to get information on the Presbyterian church and how it has responded to injustice and inequality.

Michael: Well, I was at the last General Assembly so I could tell you a little about the Confession of Belhar!

Emma: The Confession of Belhar? What's that?

Michael: Well, as you know, racism is an issue that the church has dealt with for , well, for pretty much as long as there has been a church, both in our country and across the world. In this country, as long ago as the 1960's, there were many Presbyterian pastors who risked their own safety by going to the south and helping to register black voters. It was a difficult and often frightening job, but they felt it was a matter of justice that all people should have an equal opportunity to vote for elected officials. From 1948-1994, South Africa functioned under the laws of apartheid. The actual definition of the word is "apartness." This was a system of laws that separated people by race and degree of skin tone. Racial separation was established through violence. Some **churches** even practiced racial separation! I know, that is hard to believe! Leaders of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church struggled with this, and out of their struggles came the Confession of Belhar, in the early 1980's. This confession called for unity, reconciliation and justice on the part of God's church. In June of 2016, the Presbyterian Church (USA) adopted this confession to be a part of our Book of Confessions.

Emma: That's awesome! Is there a banner for that one?

Michael: Not yet. But...there is a banner for the Brief Statement of Faith- see that one over there with the rainbow?

Emma: Yes, I see it. What's the Brief Statement of Faith?

Michael: Well, back in 1983, there was a reunion of sorts in the Presbyterian Church. At the time it was decided to prepare a brief statement that could be used in worship services. This statement emphasizes diversity and gender inclusiveness. It affirms ordination for both men and women and expresses concern for all of God's creation. On the banner, the rainbow represents the diversity of races and cultures living in Christ. The cracked earth symbolizes our tendency to divisiveness. The hands of God remind us that God holds us together and that this is the foundation of our knowledge of God's sovereign love. This banner also has the image of the PC(USA).

Emma: That one is cool!

Michael: Well, I gotta go now. Bye!

Emma: I think we have time for one more....hey! You over there! Do you have a minute to talk Presbyterian?

Libby: Who me?

Emma: Yes, you!

Libby: Sure! What do you want to talk about?

Emma: Tell me something I don't know about the Presbyterian Church!

Libby: Hmm...well did you know our motto is "reformed and always reforming?"

Emma: Interesting...but what the heck does that mean?

Libby: It means that we are constantly changing ourselves, trying to do things just a little bit better in God's world. Like for instance, just a couple of years ago, the General Assembly of the PC(USA) allowed LGBTQ people the right to be ordained as ministers and elders. This wasn't always the case. We now proclaim that any one of God's children who feels the call to serve can't be denied.

Emma: Wow!

Libby: Yep! And, it's our hope to keep breaking new ground, finding new ways to be the best people that God created us to be. We are finding ways to strike out against racism, bigotry, social and economic injustice, and world conflict. We may not always agree with each other, but we try to find ways to talk to each other and remember that we are ALL called to be God's hands and feet here. It helps us to work together and truly be a community of faith.

Emma: Well, that about wraps it up, I guess! Thanks to you all for taking the time to talk with me. I learned a lot today! This is Emma Poole, saying "Keep on Reforming!"