Exodus 15:1-11
Victory and Loss

When I was appointed here last year I asked the question of when have you seen God at work at Central? Many of y’all told the story of when this building was built. Certainly that is a wonderful story. However, there is an even older story about this church and its ties to the community. As I have considered the song of Moses in Exodus 15, and this wonderful story about Central United Methodist church an ancient church tradition has come to mind. Let us pause to consider the ways God has worked in our church’s past as a means to consider where God is leading our church in the future.

As many of you know this church building was constructed in 1956. However, it was not the first building where this congregation worshipped. Back before 1904 there was only one church in the village of Denton. It was a Missionary Baptist church. However, as the town slowly grew more and more Methodists came into this area. The Methodist Protestants met at Mt. Ebal, just a few miles outside of town. The Methodist Episcopal’s met at Siloam down closer to the Davidson-Randolf county line. By 1904 interest grew for a church “in town,” which they called the Denton Church. The Denton Church began meeting in the auditorium of Denton high school under the leadership of Rev. J. G. W. Holloway. In 1913 property was purchased on West Salisbury Ave. and Bingham St. and a brick church was constructed. Sadly, that building burned in 1915 which and the congregation went back to worshipping in the high school auditorium. In 1917 a new property was purchased on the corner of First and Bingham, and that was the property across the street.

My question is how did Central go from just getting by in an auditorium to building not one, but two buildings between 1913 and 1917. The answer might have something to do with this. Around 1910 God began working in the hearts of the Women’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Protestant Church. Mrs. W. C. Hammer, and the Rev. G. L. Reynolds answered the call. Mrs. Hammer was the conference leader of the women’s society. Rev. Reynolds was both the pastor of the old Denton Church and the principal of the high school which was a private school at the time. There was a building across the street from the high school where the South Davidson Family Resource Center stands now. Rev. Reynolds made a sacrifice on the school’s behalf by giving the old building for the founding of a Children’s home. They had $50.00 to open the orphanage. They didn’t have beds, tables, towels, or sheets. However, the Denton church was committed to the effort and worked to bring other churches in the area on board to help. By August 22 of 1910 the Children’s home had everything they needed save pillows to open the orphanage. There was no refrigeration at the time so food could not be shipped in from other places. It was the people of Denton who provided the food off of their farms, and out of their gardens for the Children’s home. The Denton church helped coordinate the efforts. Sisters and brothers; **that** is how God grew this church.

Now here these words from Moses in the fifteenth chapter of the book of Exodus. (Read Exodus 15:1-11 aloud)

My brothers and sisters God did not destroy the Egyptians by some miracle of modern warfare. God did not destroy the Egyptian army by the wit of men, or the strategy of a genius. God worked through God’s servant Moses to prove beyond a shadow of doubt there is no “g” god like our God. Amen? **Amen!** There is no other name by which people are saved. Amen?! **Amen!!** God alone has proven God’s-self faithful and true. Amen?! **Amen!!**

When it came to building a church in Denton God did not wait for the community to grow. God was not discouraged by a lack of funds. God called the people to be God’s hands and feet and the people of the old Denton Church answered. A risk was taken to serve children in need. God’s hands and feet were rallied to the call. Materials were donated. Food was bought. Tuition to the private Denton high school was offered at no cost. When the Children’s home was started the Children’s home only had fifty dollars. Even in 1910 fifty dollars was not enough – not nearly enough to start and orphanage. However, the money came in to cover their expenses. The money came in faster than the money at the Bailey Building and Loan.[[1]](#footnote-1) After three years there was no more room in the Children’s home because they had so many kids. All of the Methodist Protestant Churches were obliged by their General Conference to give in support of the Children’s home. In 1913 the Children’s home was moved to High Point. Then when the Methodist Church merged in 1939 the Children’s home was moved Winston-Salem where it is now the Methodist Children’s home for the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The point is this church grew and became a leader in the community by answering God’s call to mission in the local community. This church answered God’s call to serve a need which had been over looked, and this church grew and was blessed because they put God first. This church did not grow because it had a nicer building. This church was meeting in a high school auditorium. This church did not grow because it had an awesome young adult ministry. This church grew because it put the upward call of Christ ahead of its own personal wants and preferences. “Simply stated, the most common factor in declining churches is an inward focus.”[[2]](#footnote-2) This church grew because it did the opposite. This church grew because it was willing to take a chance in serving others for God’s glory. The question for us today is what risk are we willing to take? What do the people here at Central UMC in Denton feel God calling them to do? Who needs to be served? How can we come together to meet that need? Brothers and sisters I don’t have the answers to these questions. But I do have an idea. To do something Big for the Kingdom of God we need to let one thing die, and allow God to raise something old inside of this church.

What must die are the, “I wants.” “I want TV’s. I want more young people in church. I want a bigger sound system. I want a contemporary worship service. I want a more traditional, high church worship service. I want things the way they were. I want things to be different. I want. I want. I want. Sisters and brothers, this is God’s church. What happens here is not about what we want. What happens here ***cannot*** be about what I want. What happens here has to be about what God wants. Amen? **Amen!**

What needs to be rise is a collective heart which longs and yearns for the glory of God. Sisters and brothers that Spirit, God’s Holy Spirit is still in this place. God’s Holy Spirit is speaking through the bones of this place – through the voices of those who have gone before us. Sisters and brothers, why did Moses sing God’s praises? Moses sang God’s praises because of what the Lord had done. Why should we be singing God’s praises today? When have we felt moved to sing about our love for God? Where have we seen God gain a victory over God’s enemies; both in our hearts and in our neighbors hearts? We need to seriously think about what stories we will tell our grandchildren about this place. Will our greatest stories come from 1904? - from 1910 or 1913? - or will we sing songs and tell tales about what God is doing now, in this place, during our life time? Brothers and sisters, where is Jesus at work today?

In Jesus name – Amen.

1. Frank Capra. “It’s A Wonderful Life”, (RKO Radio Pictures: 21 December 1946). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://thomrainer.com/2014/05/common-factor-declining-churches/> (last viewed 9-21-17). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)