

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

October 23, 2011

October Theme: A SEASON OF SAINTS

Today's Saints:

Susanna Wesley & Esther Schultz



Loving God, Neighbor, and Self: Overcoming Self-Depreciation

by Larry Moffet, Senior Pastor

Hope you are enjoying hearing a little about the lives of people we call “Saints.” Last week’s local saint, **Mary Rising**, inspires me. She was able to encourage people although living with crippling arthritis which locked her in a sitting position. Ushers and students carried her up the front steps into our church. Though blind, she knew the sound of each bell brought back from around the world by mission workers and told stories about that country to raise money for Mission Shares (Apportionments).

Esther Schultz is also a local saint. Many people here knew her well. A number of us have come to First Church since she passed in 2006. Esther ran the drugstore on 48th St. She was a leader in community organizing. She served in so many ways around our church that we can’t count them all. She prepared and cleaned up Communion.

I happened to meet her because her drug store had a coffee shop: “The Sweet Shop.” When I was a layperson from Minden attending Annual Conferences here, my pastor would have his fill of sitting in meetings listening to reports. He’d look at me and say, “Let’s go to Esther’s.”

I remember the pies. Some remember her brownies. Everything was home-made. Her place was a gathering place for community and church folks.

What I didn’t know was the role Esther played in community and in the church. “She was never afraid of anything,” says Coleen. “In the early days of community organizing, when opposition was so strong, she would always be ready to keep on doing the right thing.”

Esther’s calm forward movement is the mark of a strong person. I found out after moving here that she found some of that strength in the painful days after her husband’s early passing – in their mid-life years.

She decided to keep the drug store and became a true local matriarch.

Martha Schwindt, her daughter, says it best, “Mom was pretty much community property around the church. In some ways she was ahead of her time as a woman.” Her life encouraged others in many ways. Her son-in-law, Tom, has a sister, Nancy who was also widowed early. “Nancy used Mom as an example of how to get through that time, saying

‘I can do this like Esther did.’ **She strengthened all of us.**”

Remembering Esther helps us also remember lots of other people like her who shared their strength to make us the people we are. **The list is long.**

“Which is the Greatest Commandment?” was a put-down question.. In Torah there are 613 different commandments. It was a trick: anyone could critique Jesus for picking any of the 613 commandments and ignoring the other 612. He said: **‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.**

³⁸**This is the greatest and first commandment.**

³⁹**And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**

⁴⁰**On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.**

Anne Adams writes of Susanna Wesley: “She was a wife and mother in a small English parish in the 1700’s who received little recognition for how she raised and educated more than a dozen children and coped with

a sometimes idealistic and often difficult clergyman husband. Yet from her personal influence and loving home came two sons who would experience a spiritual awakening and use that inspiration to begin a ministry that would fill a void in the national spiritual life.

Susanna's policy was "strength guided by kindness." She gave each child individual attention by setting aside a regular time for each one.

Here is a prayer by Susanna Wesley: **"Help me, Lord, to remember that religion is not to be confined to the church... nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that every where - I am in Thy Presence.**

For many years a converted foundry where cannons had been made was headquarters and home for her sons John and Charles Wesley, and the Methodist activities. In 1740 John left a lay person, Thomas Maxfield in charge at the "Foundry" while he went to Bristol. Maxfield preached a sermon when no pastor was available. This upset John. He hurried back to London. Susanna met him, persuading him to listen Maxfield preach saying: Maxfield "is as much called to preach the gospel as ever you were."

We live in a time when it is easy to take each other for granted.

I hear many of us say things like *"if I am a part of it, it can't be all that great."*

I see people being way too critical of others and of self.

Self-depreciation is the natural result when we default into critiquing others. Our lives take on a sad air when we take ourselves and our neighbors for granted.

When we expect the worst we see the worst.

When we look for worst-case results we get worst-case results.

My friends, the lives of the saints show us that **"Sad is not Deep"** and that **"Critiquing others' efforts is not Profound."**

Jesus shows us another way. His words ring across the centuries and grab us where we live. **"If we love our neighbors, then we love ourselves, and we love God; if we love God, we love others and ourselves."** It is that simple: The way to overcome our self-depreciation is to love neighbor and God.

We're going to be talking a lot about Generosity. Generosity begins with those around us. Look at the amazing people who came before us. We are constantly pressured to replace their values with greed and cynicism. The first rule for the first Methodists was "Do no harm."

Do not take for granted one person or one activity of this congregation. Many community and world-wide efforts begin right here. Look what happened here just this weekend: NWU Band Overnight, City-wide Scout event, wedding, Foodshare, backing a seminar on dismantling racism.

Paul writes people in Thessaloniki who had a low sense of self-worth, telling them (as Jamie preached last Sunday) that their generosity was amazing. He said: **"YOU are 'The Message.'**" In today's passage he helps them treat each other better by reminding them how gently he worked with them when they knew little of the faith: **But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.⁸ So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.**

WORSHIP SERVICES: SUNDAYS 8:30 & 10:45 AM
WITH ADULT AND CHILDREN'S BIBLE CLASSES AT 9:30 AM
2723 N. 50TH ST., LINCOLN, NEBRASKA
402-466-1906

EPISTLE SCRIPTURE 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-8

You yourselves know, brothers and sisters,
that our coming to you was not in vain,
²but though we had already suffered
and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know,
we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God
in spite of great opposition.

³For our appeal does not spring from deceit
or impure motives or trickery,

⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted
with the message of the gospel, even so we speak,
not to please mortals, but to please God who searches our hearts.

⁵As you know and as God is our witness,
we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed;
⁶nor did we seek praise from mortals,
whether from you or from others,

⁷though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

But we were gentle among you,
like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.

⁸So deeply do we care for you
**that we are determined to share with you
not only the gospel of God but also our own selves,**
because you have become very dear to us.

***GOSPEL SCRIPTURE MATTHEW 22:34-40**

Please read along in your Pew Bible, New Testament, page 25.

Feel free to read verses 37-40 this part of the passage out loud:

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees,
they gathered together,

³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.

³⁶‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’

³⁷He said to him,

**‘You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.**

³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment.

³⁹And a second is like it:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

**⁴⁰On these two commandments
hang all the law and the prophets.**