



*“With the Courage
of Esther”*
**James 5:13-20 and
Readings from the
Book of Esther**
Sep. 27, 2009
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**Blessed are you, Lord our God,
Ruler of the universe, who
performed miracles for our ancestors
in those days. Blessed are you, Lord
our God, Ruler of the universe,
who has granted us life, sustained
us, and enabled us to reach this
occasion. Amen.**

(Prayer traditionally said prior to re-telling the story of Esther)

Earlier in the summer, I'd invited to our towns Rev. Carl Shin, the Korean Canadian United Church minister from Nanton. Together, he and I visited the businesses owned by Korean Canadians, letting them know that our Church is available to them and also about the ESL classes that Literacy for Life hopes to hold in our building. Along the way, one couple told us that they attend the Korean Mennonite Congregation in Dewinton. They told us that their pastor, Rev. Lee, lives in Turner Valley and that his wife was opening the "Round Table" restaurant in town.

This week I finally got in to say hello: some of you have already done so telling me about the wonderful hospitality you'd received. Rev. Lee was away in Korea. But I met Sunny Lee. She told me a bit about her work in community outreach in Winnipeg years ago with an organization run by the Anglican, Mennonite and United Churches. A quilt that hangs on the wall of the restaurant was a farewell to her from her co-workers in Winnipeg. I was very excited to meet Sunny who clearly has much experience in partnership in ministry.

I let our partners at Literacy for Life know about Sunny and her background. Wednesday, Tracy Howk from Literacy for Life suggested we get lunch at the Round Table. It was after the lunch rush so Sunny sat down at one of the round tables with us. It was soon clear that Sunny's experience as a Korean-English translator and knowledge of the local Mennonite community would be beneficial to Literacy for Life.

Sunny told us that she had studied English in Korea and then theology in Winnipeg when she and her husband came to Canada. She has the same graduate degree that I have. She worked as a pastor in London, Ontario. She said she also realizes that a business can be a form of ministry. She explained that's why her business sells Fair Trade Coffee and that instead of a tip box, she has a box for a project of the Mennonite Central Committee.

Now, the Mennonite Central Committee is similar to what we in the United Church call our Mission and Service Fund. Sunny's quite specific that the money put in the box is going to build a well in a community in Africa that doesn't have clean water. Even the name of their coffee and soup shop – "Round Table" conveys the idea of Christian community.

As we were talking, a man came in to get coffee and Sunny went behind the counter to serve him. As he got a coffee, I heard her explain the "tip" box. She began by saying: "I am Mennonite."

It struck me that in this day and age, that three-word phrase, was a very courageous statement, one that she said rather matter-of-factly. “I am Mennonite.”

A statement similar to what Esther says in declaring “I am Jewish. She declares who she is after many prayerful days and nights. With God, she gained her courage. Esther declares who she is and by doing so, saved her community.

“I am Mennonite,” said Sunny and by pointing out the box for the Mennonite Central Committee she was conveying what she believes. Mennonites help other people have a good, decent life as God intended.

A wonderful aspect about meeting other brothers in sisters in Christ, our ministry partners, is that we can learn from each other. It struck me that we ought to be doing like the Mennonites.

“I am United Church” so I’d like to get together with you on Sunday but I’ll be in church for the latter part of the morning – but afterwards, I know a great restaurant run by people who attend our church where we could meet for brunch.

“I am United Church”, we could say to our neighbour. We’re having a great luncheon at our church – want to join us.

I’m United Church – that’s why I try to recycle as much as possible and try to limit how much our household throws out. We believe in a sustainable earth. “I’m United Church – we believe in being active in our community – so in our building you’ll find the Food Bank, literacy programs, programs for boys and girls.

I’m United Church – quite distinct from one of those tele-evangelicals. We’re doing a study called “Saving Jesus from the religious right and the secular left.” I’m planning to go. Would you be interested in joining me?

“I’m United Church -- you were telling me that you have meditated in the past. You obviously know the some of the benefits of prayer. Would you like to join me in walking the labyrinth at our Church on the third Thursday of the month?

I’m United Church and we believe in openness and freedom of expression. Sometimes people in my church – in my congregation or across the country – express opinions I don’t agree with. Sometimes articles about my church appear in the newspaper that I don’t agree with. But I would rather be in a Church that allows each person to speak, rather than be in a Church that tells people the exact words and phrases we are supposed to say and believe in.

I am United Church.

It takes a lot of courage to stand up and say who we are. But then, it’s also much relief to know who we are. To know that we stand for God and stand for helping others, believing in the greatness of God whose love, benevolence and mercy is greater than we can possibly imagine. That courage comes to us in prayer – as Esther found, as our James reading tells us: “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.” Let us pray for the courage and conviction to say who we are.

The story of Esther tells us of the preserving of life by the courage of one who prays. We are a group of people who pray and live to give life to others. So may we be bold and courageous in declaring who we are.

We are – United Church.