



“Live Harmoniously Upon the Earth”

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Scripture (AV):

Psalm 37 (excerpts)

Give no heed to those who are greedy, attend not to those who do wrong.
For like the green grass of spring, they soon fade and wither away.

Trust in the Most High, and seek goodness; live harmoniously upon the earth in peace and with assurance.

Take delight in the Beloved, and enjoy the bountiful gifts of Love.

Commit your life to the Beloved, confident that Love will act on your behalf,
Making clear your pathway, bright as the sun at midday.

Be still before the Beloved, and wait quietly in the Silence;
Pray for those who prosper by deceitful means, and for those who live by their own devices.

Recognize your own anger as unfulfilled desire and lift your thoughts to higher planes;
For those who act out of anger, separate themselves from Love; while those who live in harmony, shall know peace, assurance, gratitude, and love.

Those who are greedy plot against the weak, and they rationalize their selfish deeds.
The Beloved watches patiently, knowing they will stumble and have to face their own downfall.

Love walks with the upright, and their heritage is forever; in difficult times they will be assured, even in times of famine, their spirits will be filled.

But those who live by usurped power will perish; like a refining fire, their deeds will burn and vanish away in smoke.

Desire only Love and walk your days with the Beloved; you will radiate with joy, blessing others with Love's presence;
You will not know loneliness with Love's Companionship Presence.

The saving grace of the upright comes from the Beloved; Love is their refuge in times of trouble.

Love leads the way and they come home safely, delivered from those who tempt them with power.

Love invites all to open their hearts.

Sermon:

It began 32 years after Dr. Marcus Whitman and his wife, Narcissa, and 12 others died at Walla Walla during an uprising of the Cayuse tribe. Suffering extreme loss of life from an outbreak of measles, the tribe sought to drive white settlers out of their territory. Entire tribal communities died in a matter of days, from newborn babies to elders. They realized that the measles would wipe them out and they sought to eliminate that danger as quickly as they could. So, the mission of white people abruptly ended in the Washington-Oregon territory. For a time.

A scant 14 years after the end of the Civil War, Henry and Lucy Cowley came west with their three children. They came by transcontinental railroad to San Francisco, by steamer to Portland Oregon, by boat to the Dalles, and then overland by wagon.

They began at Lapwai Oregon, then moved to begin a school along the beautiful Spokane River.

According to their daughter, Edith Cowley, the Spokane tribe had asked for a school to learn of the white people's ways and to learn about the white people's religion.

According to Carol Evans, currently the leader of the Spokane tribe, three chiefs governed the people at that time. Chief Enoch Selquoiah believed that if the Spokane people learned the ways of the whites, they would not be forced off their land. He invited white

missionaries to the tribal lands, and even donated land and labor for the school and the home of that first missionary family.

From what can be found of recollections of those first few years...it was a beautiful beginning. The land around here caused Rev. Cowley to wax poetic: *“My first glimpse of the site of the future magnificent city was unfurled to view from the cliff near the head of Washington St. and was so enchanting, that I dismounted and spent several moments enjoying its grandeur and beauty. Here seemed to be the setting of the elements of an ideal city—even a corner of Paradise. To the east and west the panorama of the tranquil and majestic Spokane valley stretched out before me, while beneath lay an extensive pine grove, golden with the wild sunflower, and the ear caught the melodious murmur of the series of waterfalls.”*

Again, according to Edith’s recollections, her father was a natural linguist and he knew all the principal languages and dialects of the tribes throughout the region.

Beginning the school, Rev. Cowley was pressured by the whites around him to help them begin a church as well.

So, it began in the Cowley log cabin, with prayers and scripture, eight pioneer people and two Spokane tribal members signed a charter on May 22, 1879. The Superintendent of Home Missions presided over the founding.

By 1881 the tiny community had a building on Sprague and a fresh faced young pastor from Yale who came west with his wife. They “found the west very different from what they had expected, but did their best to adapt themselves to their new surroundings.”

They lasted a scant two years and were followed by a man “who had more of the spirit and temperament of the pioneer.”

The spirit of the pioneer usually was a spirit of hard work! These early pastors built their own homes sometimes; certainly, they split their own wood. You did without a lot of things back then. You learned to eat what you could hunt, barter, buy. You had to be willing to live on a tiny salary, accept gifts of clothes and comforts from churches back East, sending them out to the “wild west”. It was hard work, year in and year out.

Yet, some of them stayed. They dreamed, they built. Our church history is full of serious and silly stories of people who believed in the town they were creating, loved the land upon which they lived.

Certainly, in their own way, the builders of Westminster believed in doing good, and living good lives, according to their understanding of what God desired of them. We must not look at them simply through our contemporary eyes...asking ourselves how they could steal the land and drive out the Spokane people.

Rev. Cowley did teach among the Spokane tribe and he urged them to learn how to farm and take hold of the land so that by American law, they could keep their land. Edith Cowley again remarked that “many and many a time has the talk about our fireside been of the white man’s settling on Indian land when it didn’t belong to him.”

The story of Westminster and the tribe seem to diverge at the point when Rev. Cowley was thrown from his horse, suffered a broken hip and could no longer ride at all. He resigned as Indian agent.

Yet those early church folk carried on...seeing lots of young pastors come and go. Lucy Peet Cowley, pioneer woman and pastor’s wife, worked intensely for the good of the young church until her death in 1900. It is thanks to her that we have the yearly “apple blossom tea” which she instituted as a day of rest and refreshment for the hard working pioneer women and girls of the church.

Eighteen hundred, ninety three was a year of financial chaos, a “crash” year...the early congregation promised \$17,000 towards the bill on this great granite building we worship in, yet the church collected only \$1,700 in pledges.

The building was up, yet...the note was in the hands of the bank and it looked as if they might lose it. Mrs. Mary T. Gamble went from church member to member over the course of one weekend and drummed up enough of a payment to get the bank off their backs and keep the church doors open.

On Dec. 31, 1893 the Presbyterian Congregation of Westminster, joined the First Congregational Church in their building, creating the unusual name we know and that we carry today. The story goes that the Presbyterians had a pastor but no church, and the Congregationalists had a church but no pastor...so a union of the two churches seemed to

make sense. The Presbyterian pastor stayed four months and the next pastor after him was from the Methodist Episcopal church.

Westminster saw Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist pastors, as well as Congregational pastors. It seems that a certain rough ecumenism already existed out west!

There are many more stories to tell...the story of the squatters on this piece of land, who built all night in the dark, and at dawn, a full complement of squatters shacks was determined to claim this spot. Then, after a suspiciously quiet morning, in the afternoon, with a rush and a roar of shouting, men and police came charging up the hill, dragged the squatters off their chairs, dismantled the shacks and left the ground bare...to build this church that we are sitting in this morning!

What shall we say about those early years? What can we learn from them for ourselves?

They wanted beauty; they wanted homes in this beautiful land, a place to raise their children in peace. They tried to share the love of God, their devotion to Jesus. They believed in the future. They believed in one another.

They didn't give up. They were often harassed by money problems, building problems, staff shortages. There was heroism, and comedy! They ate together often.

They are behind us, pushing us into the future.

Roger Shinn, a UCC pastor and historian wrote, "Whenever I look behind me, I see our forebears steadfastly looking ahead."

Good people, they are behind us, looking ahead to us.

As we begin our 140th year as a faith community, we can thank them, and we can look steadfastly forward, like them.