

***“Following the Great Commission”***  
***Psalm 19:1-4; Matthew 28:16-20; Ephesians 4:1-7***  
***Salem United Methodist Church;***  
***October 4, 2015***  
***Rev. Dr. Sue Shorb-Sterling***

The World Council of Churches claims today, the first Sunday in October, to be World Communion Sunday. This celebration of Christians around the world united in Jesus Christ through Holy Communion began at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburg, PA in 1933. The concept caught on after World War II when Christians saw our communion with Christ and each other as a means of offering healing and hope for the worldwide church community. Today it is celebrated in many denominations throughout the world because the world is still in need of this healing and hope. Here at Salem we are honored to be celebrating this holy moment with our Korean brothers and sisters in Christ, the OURI Korean church, who worship here on Sunday afternoons.

Have you ever thought about how Christianity spread from one city, Jerusalem, to become a faith that is now a worldwide religion? Jesus began this faith phenomenon when he charged his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. I can only imagine what these former fishermen with the other disciples from humble beginnings thought when Jesus said to them, “Go to all nations.” They were not worldwide travelers. The furthest most of them ever traveled was from Galilee to Jerusalem and that was with Jesus. Their concept of the world only extended as far as the Roman Empire held its claim. In the first chapter of the Book of Acts right before Jesus ascends into heaven, he tells his disciples that they will be his witnesses not just in Jerusalem, but in the whole country of Judea and Samaria. There was a huge religious divide between these two countries. The Judeans and the Samaritans disagreed on both how to worship God and where God could be worshiped. With this charge to his disciples, Jesus saw their witness to become a means of unifying the Judeans and the Samaritans. But Jesus doesn’t stop there. He also charges his disciples to be his witnesses to the end of the earth. These disciples had little to no knowledge of places like northern Europe, Asia, Australia, the Americas, and most of Africa. Yet the witness that they gave, the places they went, along with the witness of the Apostle Paul, the Good News of Jesus Christ was spread throughout the world. Their witness made disciples for Jesus Christ from age to age until this day.

The Methodist Episcopal Church in the latter part of the 1800s took Jesus’ Great Commission to go into the world and make disciples seriously. They began to send missionaries to different countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Their main focus in Asia was Japan, China, India, and Korea. In honor of our Korean brothers and sisters, I would like to share with you the connection we have to the first Methodist missionaries to Korea. This year, 2015, marks the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christianity in Korea. As I read this history, I could see God’s hand at work. First there was Rev. John Goucher who was the pastor at Lovely Lane Methodist Church in Baltimore. In the early 1880s he was taking a train trip and met some Korean diplomats. From his encounters with these Koreans, Goucher felt God calling him to give money to begin missionary efforts in Korea. So he gave \$2000, which is close to \$50,000 in today’s currency, to the Methodist Episcopal Missionary Society asking them to use this money to send missionaries to Korea. One might ask how a pastor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century came into this much money. John Goucher married into money. His father-in-law wanted to know if he was marrying his daughter for love or for her money. He answered him that he was marrying her for love, but he would see that the money was invested well. He and his wife did. They invested their wealth in building the kingdom of God. The Gouchers became the benefactors of many missionary efforts throughout Asia, as well as in the United States. Yes, this is the same Goucher who began the Women’s College of Baltimore, now named Goucher College. About the same time that Goucher felt God nudging him to give money for new missions in Korea, Rev. Henry Appenzeller and his new bride, Ella, from Lancaster, PA felt a call to go to Korea as missionaries. They approached the Mission Society who approved their venture because they had the Gouchers money to send them. The Appenzellers arrived in Korea on Easter Sunday, April 5, 1885. The United States had just established a diplomatic relationship with Korea which made it possible for them to go there. However, Korea would only accept

them as missionaries if they focused on education and medical treatment, which they did. Neither the Korean officials nor the American missionaries had any idea how much their presence and their ministry would impact the nation of Korea. During the seventeen years that Appenzellers were in Korea they experienced both personal and political hardships, but that didn't stop them. Within two years, Henry established a school for boys in Seoul called PaiChai Hakdang or Baejae School. One of his students from this school, Syngman Rhee, became a leader in the movement for Korea to become a democratic nation. After years of struggle, Rhee became Korea's first president. Appenzeller's other accomplishments included the establishment of the first Korean Methodist church, Chungdong. He assisted with the first Korean translation of the Bible and he helped to establish a Christian Korean publishing house. His wife, Ella along with another Methodist missionary from Pennsylvania, Mary Scranton, began Ewha Hangdang, the first school for girls in Korea. Today Ewha Women's University is the world's largest women's college. Mary's son, Dr. William Scranton, established Korea's first modern hospital. He is to have treated over 1000 people in his first year as a medical missionary. These American Methodist missionaries to Korea kept their agreement to focus on education and medical missions, but their schools and hospitals became a way to spread the Christian faith as well as make fast improvements in education and medicine in Korea. According to Rev. Dae Sung Park, a Korean church historian and pastor of a new Korean United Methodist Church in Ellicott City, these missionary schools and hospitals assisted the lower class of people called the "sang min" and "chun min." Through these ministries of health and education, the poorer people of Korea began to accept the Christian faith. This is how Christianity became established in Korea. 130 years later there are 6,206 Methodist churches in Korea with 1,462,772 members and 10,326 pastors. Our bishop, Rev. Marcus Matthews and our District Superintendent, Jongwoo (JW) Park, along with many others from the Baltimore-Washington Conference celebrated the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Methodism in Korea this past Easter Sunday, April 5.

Rev. Appenzeller recorded in his journal this prayer on the day he sat foot on Korean soil, "May he who this day burst the bars of the tomb bring light and liberty to Korea." 130 years later, Bishop Matthews summarized the journey of the Korean Methodist Church as one of inviting people to "come and see the glory of God," to be transformed by the Living Christ, and then "go and tell the Gospel story." These words also summarize who we are as Christians today. We are still inviting people to "come, see the glory of God," inviting them to be transformed by the Living Christ, and then inviting them "go and tell the Gospel story." Today we at Salem are making own history. We have opened our doors to a new Korean church. On this World Communion Sunday we welcome them to worship and share in Holy Communion as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are all family because Jesus came as the Son of God to be our brother. He experienced our life and death so we could be united as the children of the perfect heavenly father. As we come together to the Lord's Table, we give thanks for what Jesus has done for us. We remember what Jesus that Jesus offers us the forgiveness of our sins and the hope of a new life. In addition, Jesus the Christ invites us to receive the self-giving nature of God represented in the food made from grains and grapes. We receive these gifts as an outward sign of the inward grace from God. These gifts sustain and nourish us for the journey of our salvation. John Wesley wrote, "This is food of our souls: This gives strength to perform our duty, and leads us on to perfection." We could also say that these gifts are God's "show and tell" for us, letting us know that we, with all our faults and limitations, can receive and experience the grace of God. No matter what our limitations may be or what our heritage is we are all invited to receive these gracious gifts of God. They are for everyone. In The United Methodist Church, the Lord's Table is open for everyone to receive and be united as one with Christ and one with each other. Thus this communion with God and with each other becomes our healing and our hope of salvation.

**Resources:** "A Century After: The Legacy of the Appenzellers, Pioneer Missionaries to Korea" by Kent E. Kroehler; "Celebrating 130 years of Korean Methodism" by Melissa Lauber; *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* by Gayle Carlton Felton