



Mennonite Heritage Sunday – October 28, 2012

Prepared by Will Loewen, Pastor at Trinity Mennonite Church, Calgary Alberta.

Introduction

Heritage Sunday is a time for Mennonite and Anabaptist churches to celebrate their theological distinctives. We can reflect on the spiritual journey that has produced a broad range of communities within the Anabaptist community. It is a time for us to look back and remember the courage and convictions of our spiritual ancestors. While their society was fundamentally different from ours, we can learn from the struggles they faced, what motivated them, and their testimony to the people that survived them. Many of those martyr stories have been assembled by early Dutch Anabaptists, and handed down to us today in a book called *The Martyr's Mirror*.

Although many Anabaptist Christians now live in safety and prosperity in many parts of the world, we still hear stories of contemporary martyrs and other persecuted Christians. Some countries are hostile toward the Christian faith, so local Christians and foreign missionaries face persecution for the way they carry out the gospel. Some governments endorse only one expression of the Christian church, and so leaders of other churches face suspicion and hostility. In other countries, a holistic gospel of peace, justice and equality as integral parts of the salvation message interferes with military and corporate interests. So, as we remember medieval martyrs, we also reflect on those whose witness can still threaten their lives. We don't do this to demonize any particular enemy, past or present, but to encourage each other, no matter what hardships we face.

THEME: A MEMORIAL OF TRUTH

Foundational Story

In the year 1560, two women, one we only know as Martha and one named Soetgen Van Den Houte, were arrested and tried for having an Anabaptist faith. Soetgen's husband had been executed for the same crime six years earlier. As she waited to be sentenced, she composed a letter to her three children, encouraging them not to be afraid to live out the gospel, to pursue holiness and live worthy of the grace they had received.

One scholar commented that he was scouring through documents like this letter trying to find what the early Anabaptists were thinking. At first he thought their frequent scripture quotations were interfering with his quest to understand their thought processes, until he

realized that Scripture was what they were thinking. These early Anabaptists; many of whom were illiterate peasants, memorized and categorized large portions of scripture. They did this for their own spiritual walk but also for the edification of others.

Soetgen Van Den Houte's letter contains over seventy scripture references, a testament to her faithfulness and the example she seeks to set for her children. Here is an excerpt of her letter:

"In the first place, I admonished you, my most beloved, always to suffer yourself to be instructed by those who fear the Lord; then you will please God, and as long as you obey good admonition and instruction, and fear the Lord, He will be your Father and not leave you orphans. For David says, 'What man is he that feareth the Lord? Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.' Ps. 25: 12. He also says, 'The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death. The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him. O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him; for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' Ps. 33:18, 19; 34:7, 9; 111:10.

Scripture Texts: Psalm 34:1-8, (19-22), Job 42:1-6, 10-17, Mark 10:46-52, Hebrews 7:23-28

Only the Psalm passage is referenced in Soetgen's letter, but the accompanying passages fit her theme – that those who are suffering can reach out to God who promises to reach out to those who are in pain.

Song suggestions:

- HWB #283 – *Christ who left his home in glory*
- SJ #61 – *How can we be silent*
- HWB #438 – *I sing with exultation*
- SS #83 – *Remember me*
- HWB #506 – *I sought the Lord*
- SS #120 – *Somebody prayed for me*
- HWB #552 – *By gracious powers*

A Memorial of Truth (attached) – composed for this occasion and based on Soetgen's letter (Ana Loewen, 2012). For added dramatic effect, a female soloist dressed in Reformation era garb could sing this hymn.

HWB - *Hymnal Worship Book*, SJ - *Sing the Journey*, SS - *Sing the Story**

* Song book abbreviations match those used for corresponding worship resources in *Leader Magazine*



GATHERING

Call to Worship

Leader: O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him. (Psalm 34: 8)

(pause)

Leader: We know that you, O Lord, can do all things;

People: *None of your purposes can be thwarted;*

Leader: We have spoken about things we don't understand,

People: *Things too wonderful for us to know.*

All: O Lord, speak and we will pay attention.

Confession: We have heard you with our ears, and now we see with our eyes. We muddy the waters of your truth. We are unworthy to answer when you question us, and we repent in dust and ashes!

Assurance: With gratitude we remember your word, "O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him." (Psalm 34: 8)

Offering Prayer:

O Lord, you show us, those who seek to be your faithful followers, the way that we should live.

We have inherited from you that which we have not earned.

You have proven yourself faithful and reliable

to those who keep your covenant and your decrees.

Bless us now as we respond by giving back to you a portion of what we have received. Amen.

LISTENING

Scripture Reading: Psalm 34: 1-8, 19-22

Children's time

The gospel text for today tells the story of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar who cried out to Jesus for help. Christ's compassion is a reminder for all of us to be faithful and trust in him. Martyrdom is a tough sell for adults and can be horrifying for children, but this story communicates the same truth about persevering despite struggles. www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1772

Sermon starters

Reading the letter from Soetgen Van Den Houte (*Martyr's Mirror*, page 646), the contemporary reader will find encouragement in her devotion, her love of scripture, her call to righteous living, etc. There will, however, be some aspects that are more difficult for current congregations to handle. Her call for holy living includes outright prohibition on various recreational activities. Is that still relevant for

us today? Her use of scripture is wonderful; especially considering it was all from memory. Can we still call our congregations to commit that much scripture to memory or to speak with that many Biblical references? Finally, she was writing with her own death as an imminent reality. If her children take her teachings to heart, their lives, too, may be at risk. What would we write to our children if our deaths were imminent? What faithful living risks are we willing to impose on our children? Without the threat of physical punishment, at least in the West, is there still relevance to this martyr's call?

RESPONDING

Prayer for martyrs

Our Great God,

You are the same yesterday, today and forever. Help us, as your children,

to honour those who have gone before, to love our neighbours as ourselves,

and to leave a memorial of truth for those who will come after us.

Be with your children around the world;

those who face persecution simply for calling on your name,

those who lack the freedom to worship you with integrity,

those whose words of truth will offend powerful people.

Amen.

Benediction

Receive the testimony of those believers who have gone before. Listen to the words, written in freedom and in bondage. Let them testify by example, in life or in death, by the help of the Most High.

May the Lord continue to reveal the Word of God through apostles and prophets, saints and scripture.

May the wisdom of the Holy Ghost instruct and strengthen you therein, that you may be built up in the ways of the Lord.

Go in grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Direct your comments about Special Sunday Worship Resources to Elsie Rempel at erempel@mennonitechurch.ca.

A Memorial of Truth

Lyrics by: Will Loewen

Music by: Ana Loewen

Grace, love, peace and mer - cy from our Lord God on High.

Grace, peace, mer - cy

The first system of music features a treble and bass staff in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat. The treble staff contains the vocal melody, and the bass staff provides a simple accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Grace, love, peace and mer - cy from our Lord God on High." and "Grace, peace, mer - cy".

3
Through my words and death, I hope to tes - ti - fy

I hope to tes - ti - fy

The second system of music continues the melody. It begins with a measure rest for three measures, indicated by the number '3'. The lyrics are: "Through my words and death, I hope to tes - ti - fy" and "I hope to tes - ti - fy".

5
an ex - am - ple to you. A me - mo - ri - al - of

A me - mo - ri - al of -

The third system of music continues the melody. It begins with a measure rest for five measures, indicated by the number '5'. The lyrics are: "an ex - am - ple to you. A me - mo - ri - al - of" and "A me - mo - ri - al of -".

Option 1: Lower parts sing "Ooh"

Option 2: All parts sing melody

7

truth. *Altos: Ooh-*

1.First, I ad - mon - ish you,
 2.If you learn to fear the Lord
 3.You should ra - ther be - wronged
 4.Some who have gone be - fore

9

don't re - fuse co - rrec - tion. Learn from those who fear God,
 your wis - dom will in - crease. Flee from ha - tred en - vy,
 than you grieve an - oth - er. Better you are slan - dered
 gave us an ex - am - ple. Just like the pro - phets and

11

Ooh

fo - llow good in - struction. Take re - fuge in the Lord and
 ex - cess and va - ni - ties. Guard your tongue, speak the truth -
 than you harm your bro - ther. Pray for those who hate - you,
 Christ and his dis - ci - ples. Va - liant - ly trea - ding the

13

Ooh Ooh

good - things are in store.
 Oh my lambs in your youth.
 love your en - e - mies too.
 wine - pres of suff - ring.

Ooh - - - Ooh

A Memorial of Truth

(Accompaniment)

Lyrics by: Will Loewen

Music by: Ana Loewen

Soprano & Alto

Teno & Bass

Piano

Grace, love, peace and mer - cy from our Lord God on High. Through my words and death,
Grace, peace, mer - cy

S & A

T & B

Pno.

I hope to tes-ti-fy an example to you. A memo-ri-al of truth. I hope to tes-ti-fy A me - mo-ri-al of

Alto: Ooh---

- 1.First, I ad-monish you,
- 2.If you learn to fear the Lord
- 3.You should ra-ther be - wronged
- 4.Some who have gone be - fore

Option 1: Lower parts sing "Ooh"
Option 2: All parts sing verse in unison

A Memorial of Truth (2)

9

S & A

don't re - fuse co - rrec - tion. Learn from those who fear God, fo - llow good in - struc - tion.
 your wis - dom will in - crease. Flee from ha - tred en - vy, ex - cess and va - ni - ties.
 than you grieve an - oth - er. Better you are slan - dered than you harm your bro - ther.
 gave us an ex - am - ple. Just like the pro - phets and Christ and his dis - ci - ples.

T & B

- - - Ooh - - - Ooh -

Pno.

12

S & A

Take re - fuge in the Lord and good - things are in store.
 Guard your tongue, speak the truth - Oh my lambs in your youth.
 Pray for those who - hate you, love your en - e - mies too.
 Va - liant - ly trea - ding the wine - pres of suff - 'ring.

T & B

Ooh - - - Ooh - - - Ooh

Pno.