



Sharing the Good News!

Penn Northeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

FAITH: Sometimes a matter of the heart, sometimes a matter of the head, sometimes both! by Alan C. Miller, Conference Minister

At the 2007 Annual Meeting of the Penn Northeast Conference, held October 20, 2007 at Faith UCC, Hazleton, we sang a lot of hymns. We were blessed that day to have the Rev. Stephen Engelhardt (Pastor of Trinity UCC, Bloomsburg) as our song-leader. Steve began the day by helping us to see that some hymns are “hymns of the heart” while other hymns are “hymns of the head.” Often times the “hymns of the heart” are the ones we know by heart as their tunes and lyrics recall very meaningful times and experiences from our past. On the other hand, we frequently need to turn to the hymnal to sing the “hymns of the head,” for these hymns remind us of the great tenets of our faith that are not always associated with a cherished remembered experience.

Within the life of faith there is frequently a struggle between the heart and the head. John Wesley, the founder of the modern United Methodist Church, often struggled with the gap between the faith he yearned to feel and the faith he professed. On a journey to America in 1738, he met Moravian Peter Bohler, who encouraged him to “preach faith until you have it.” During a meeting of a small group of believers on May 24, 1738, Bohler’s advice came alive to him. Later he wrote of the incident:

In the evening, I went very unwilling to a society in Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther’s “Preface” to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. (Rack, 144)

Wesley was going through a valley in his spiritual pilgrimage and went to that meeting more out of belief than out of a felt spirituality, and yet while there his heart was “strangely warmed.”

Recently I received news that intensified the struggle between heart and head in my own faith experience. On April 7th I learned that I have a chronic, non-curable disease; I have lupus. As I walked from the doctor’s office to my car the struggle began. I tried to remember all of the inner confidence that I had felt when I had reassured parishioners after they had received worrisome medical news. I tried to remember all of the sermons I had ever preached on Luke 12:22-31, trying to convince myself that I don’t have to worry because in God’s eyes I am worth more than the ravens and the lilies and God takes care of them. But somehow it wasn’t working, the more I tried to rationalize with my head, the less reassured I felt in my heart. It was at that moment that I most clearly understood faith. Faith is believing in that which we cannot see and sometimes cannot even feel in the face of life’s uncertainties. At times faith hangs by the thread of rational belief while our heart runs wild with worry. At other times faith is reassured by the heart, whether it be by a beautiful sunset or the tender touch of a loved one while our mind still seeks definitive answers to some of life’s most perplexing problems. And there are those wonderful moments when both heart and head are reassured at the same time --- moments of grace!

But either way: heart, head, or both, the promise of faith is the same -- God will be with us in and through all things! So, how am I doing with the lupus? Pretty well thank you! A friend who has had lupus for a very long time has been teaching my head that this is a manageable condition. And friends and family members have been reassuring my heart that they love me and are there for me. God is good – all the time! All the time – God is good!

TO CONTACT US OR TO REGISTER FOR EVENTS

431 Delaware Avenue www.pnec.org web page 610-826-3113 phone
Palmerton, PA 18071-1908 610-826-5464 fax
Alan Miller: AlanM@pnec.org Toby Holleman: TobyH@pnec.org
Barbara Jennings: BarbaraJ@pnec.org Patty Rehrig: PattyR@pnec.org
Beverly McClure: BeverlyM@pnec.org
Fran Potters (Resource Center) – Resource@pnec.org