

HERITAGE SUNDAY  
“Exploring Our Quilt”  
By Rev. James C. Ramsey, Pastor  
EAST UNION PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Texts: 2 Kings 22:1-11  
Hebrews 11 (selected verses)

Preached: 10/28/18

Wrap up in a Work of Love – As the days grow colder this fall, who doesn't like to wrap up in a cozy, warm blanket, lean back in a favorite chair at home and watch a football game. This morning we wrap up in what the quilters of East Union called “a work of love to the glory of God.”

Today we celebrate Heritage Sunday, a day to give thanks for the heritage we have here at East Union Presbyterian Church. I know church means different things to different people. We have all come to be here from different roads, each of us with a different story of how we arrived here and what this special place means to us. Regardless of how we arrived here, whether by invitation of a friend, introduction by way of Deer Lakes Nursery School or the Santa Breakfast or by family who brought us here for the first time many years ago, we are stitched together in a kind of quilt. Each of us a panel or a square, with a particular gift to share and a particular story to tell.

Our scriptures this morning tell the stories of faith heroes. First, from 2 Kings, the story of Israel's King Josiah – one of the few good kings in a long list of bad ones. He oversaw the restoration of the temple after many years of neglect and, in the renovation, a significant scroll was discovered. It was probably the Book of Deuteronomy. When Josiah hears the words read, he is moved to rend his clothes in an outpouring of emotion and faith!

Then, from the Book of Hebrews, a veritable who's who of our ancestors in the faith...Noah...Abraham and Sarah...Moses.

Presbyterian Pastor Eugene Peterson puts the words of scripture in modern language in THE MESSAGE. Here's how Peterson introduces these heroes:

*11 1-2 The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.*

*3 By faith, we see the world called into existence by God's word, what we see created by what we don't see.*

We celebrate the “acts of faith” today, done right here at East Union Church. Who do you look to as a faith hero here? Is it a Sunday School teacher, a friend sitting in the same row (nearby pew), a quiet servant with whom you've worked, a Deacon, an Elder, a greeter, a musician? Faith is like the thread that binds us together.

If you've been around here awhile, you've probably walked by the quilt dozens of times. Maybe you noticed it when it hung in Kennedy Hall, or later, in the hallway outside Founders' Chapel. If you are relatively new here, perhaps you were unaware of our quilt. The quilt is not ancient. Thirty-seven people worked on it for almost a year, finishing in 1985. Some of those people are no longer with us,

some have moved on, but several remain active East Union members. You can see the names of those who worked on it on page 10 of your Compass Points.

The Quilt is made up of 30 squares. I thought I would take some time this morning to highlight just five of those squares. I've chosen these particular ones simply because each one appeals to me personally...you might choose five different squares for your own sermon! You can see a diagram of our Quilt on page 10 of your Compass Points, where each of the squares are numbered. Following pages briefly describe each of the squares.

I begin with Square 3 – EAST UNION PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH spelled out in a triangle (for the Trinity) with the Chi-Rho symbol in the middle (for Christ). You might note that Square 18 also features a triangle and the Chi-Rho symbol.

On either side of Square 3 you will see our church buildings depicted – the descriptions of those two squares are notable (the Founders' Chapel and Educational wing was built in 1850 and 1957 respectively – they are physical evidences of those who have worshiped here before us, faith to build a church where one had never been before and faith to expand a church because of a growing membership – it was an investment in the future. And (in 1962 our new sanctuary was built) When the quilt was finished, the “new sanctuary” was already 23 years old...now it is 56 years old! I didn't choose either of the building squares – because, as important as our buildings are, the church is not the buildings...but rather the people in this place called together to serve God.

Of course, we are Presbyterian, and thus Trinitarian in our theology – acknowledging God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...one God, three distinct Persons. Our church name is spelled out in the shape of a triangle...we are to take on the makeup of the Trinity. I was always somewhat mystified by this Christian notion of God as One in Three and Three in One. I still am.

One of the most compelling writings on the Trinity that I have come across is this book by Leonardo Boff: *Trinity and Society*. I was forced to read it in seminary for my Reformed Theology Class.

The basic premise of the book, which Boff has made, now, in multiple other works, is this concept of the Trinity as God in community, the three members of the Godhead living and working together in harmony, each one distinct, each one standing on its own, but always related and connected to the others, perfectly in sync – a model for us as God's people working together.

Leonardo Boff is a Brazilian theologian and writer, known for his active support for liberation theology, which emphasizes social concern for the poor and political liberation for oppressed peoples. Boff currently serves as Professor Emeritus of Ethics, Philosophy of Religion, and Ecology at the Rio de Janeiro State University. When I saw Square 3 I immediately thought of Boff and his groundbreaking explication of the Trinity.

You have probably seen the Chi-Rho symbol before. Here it is depicted on the labarum, a Roman military standard. The "Chi-Rho" symbol is a christogram formed from the first two Greek letters of the word "Christ" (Χριστός) — Chi (χ) and Rho (ρ). It was first used by the Roman emperor Constantine the Great, who famously converted to Christianity in the fourth century.

Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, has called us here and should remain the foundation of everything we do as a church. Let Christ remain the center of our faith here at East Union.

I want to briefly highlight Square 6 – which depicts a CELTIC CROSS – the circle in the cross is symbolic of eternal life.

Six years ago I was privileged to travel to Scotland on my first pastoral sabbatical. Here I am with my family standing in front of the ancient abbey on the island of Iona, a giant stone Celtic Cross towering above us. The symbol of the Celtic Cross reminds us of our Presbyterian roots. Scotland is where the Presbyterian Church was founded, by the reformer John Knox, a student and admirer of John Calvin.

We saw lots of Celtic crosses on our travels. I wanted to take pictures of all of them. They probably all look the same to you. But each one had a character and a starkness. To walk by them, standing where they were planted for centuries, was a moving experience.

All three of these crosses were from Iona. The Iona Community is an ecumenical Christian community of peace, headquartered in the restored abbey on Iona. You have often heard words from the Iona Community, as I like to use the community's prayers for communion occasionally and will also sprinkle in prayers every once in a while from the Iona Community Worshipbook.

I next highlight Square 20 – HANDS CLASPED in a weave pattern. This is how the East Union Youth Group historically said its benediction at the end of each meeting. I'm glad our Quilt isn't all about the faithful adults who have lived and served here, although there have been many. But East Union has always placed a high importance on the young, who are not only the future of our faith community, but can teach us older folks, if we can find it in ourselves to listen! I would note that this is not the only Square that refers to children – Square 11 depicts our Sunday School and Square 10 refers to the junior and adult choirs.

This symbol of hands clasped represents our connectedness through fellowship and fun, witness and service.

Square 25 – WE WITNESS AS ONE – The church's boards (Session, Trustees, Deacons), as well as the committees and organizations and all of our members and friends are represented in this square. We have a common goal...to share the love of God with everyone. This witness continues today. We share God's love through mission, outreach, hospitality...through Faithful Followers, Interfaith Hospitality Network and our Haiti Project...through the Women's Tea, the Santa Breakfast, Vacation Bible School, and Trunk or Treat.

When we talk heritage, we have to mention our history. Square 28 – depicting THE BELL – lifts up a particular part of East Union's history. The actual bell now hangs from a stand that sits on the porch of our sanctuary. Most of us never see it, because we park in our parking lot and enter the buildings from there. You would have to park in the parking lot across the street by our cemetery to really notice the bell as you came up the front walk into our sanctuary by the main doors.

When the Russelton Presbyterian Church merged with East Union in 1959, a few items, including the Bell, were brought to East Union. There aren't too many members left now that belonged to the Russelton Church. We lost one this past week in dear Ella Baker. Ella died one day short of her 105<sup>th</sup> birthday. She had been our oldest living member.

In 1884, a test drilling indicated that the area near Russelton, PA supported a rich vein of coal. By the end of 1904 the first coal mine was fully operational and the Bessemer Coal and Coke Company had built a cluster of homes to house the miners.

In 1908, to service the religious needs of the miners and their families, East Union church established a mission outpost that met weekly at the boarding house in Russelton. Various ministers preached at the services, and the women of East Union organized a Sunday School. Trustees from East Union, working with various trustees of other local churches began to raise funds to build the Russelton flock their own church. In addition, East Union also established a "Sabbath School" in Curtisville, another mining town a few miles away!

We share a unique heritage here at East Union Presbyterian Church. Those who came before us accomplished much, have handed down to us a quilt full of faithful examples and inspiring stories.

We can best honor them and what they have gifted us by forging ahead, by setting new examples of faith. Inspired by the past, let us set a course for the future, investing in new projects, looking to be creative and courageous in this new day!