

PASTORATE OF FORTY-THREE YEARS AT UNION CHURCH, MISSISSIPPI

Union Church was organized in March, 1817, by the Presbytery of Mississippi, with 26 charter members, and it is now the third oldest Presbyterian organization in the Southwest. We have two churches that are older, Pine Ridge in Adams County, and Bethany in Amite. All three of these churches go back to the earliest pioneer days of Presbyterianism in the Southwest.

The history of Union Church indeed, however, goes back to 1811, when evangelists from the Synod of the Carolinas collected small congregation there. The earliest membership was composed mainly of immigrants from North Carolina and some from Tennessee. After the organization, a small store-house was built and a post office established, and around this small nucleus a little village has gradually been built up, which is known as Union Church.

This place is far out in the country, 25 miles from Brookhaven on the Illinois Central Railroad, 21 miles from Fayette on the Mississippi Valley Railroad, 45 miles from Natchez, 28 from Port Gibson, 32 from Hazlehurst, 20 from Meadville; so that anyone can see that this church is par excellence, a country church. The only way of access is by the great public roads. And until the auto cars came, a short time ago, we were reached only by horses and buggies and carriages.

We observe that in some quarters, churches in towns of 2,000 inhabitants claim the name of country churches; but Union Church Presbyterian Church is out and out a country church. It is indeed so far from the railroad and the roads in the winter have been so very bad—the mud being sometimes knee-deep and rivers and creeks being impassable—that people in the towns and cities would never think of turning their faces toward Union Church.

On one occasion, a young man was elected to be teacher of our school at Union Church. He left the railroad and came out 22 miles, where he spent the night. While there, as we suppose, he pondered over the long roads, and next morning he turned his horse around and went straight back, and we have never seen him since. Later on, a young lady was chosen to be our music-teacher and

she came out with high hopes, but when she got settled, she too thought of the long distance and hope died out in her young heart and after two or three classes she too left us, and we have seen her no more.

It is really and truly out of the way and far off in the country. But the birds have been singing here to admiring listeners for 100 years. The flowers and the grasses have been blooming and growing and the pure spring water has been flowing, for nearly 100 years just below the church building, and the great forest trees have been lifting up their branches and have been waving in the winds, and nature has carried on its great process in silence and dignity.

The community was composed very largely of Scotch people. In the old records of Union Church we find 25 sets of Mc's: McArn, McArthur, McBride, McCall, McCallum, McCormick, McDonald, McLaurin, McLean, McMillan, McPherson, etc. These names establish the claim of the name, Scotch Settlement, which has long been applied to it. There have been six different sets of Buies, 16 families of Catos, and a long list of other names. Listen to some of them: Alsworth, Baker, Barnes, Blue, Brown, Cameron, Clark, Currie, Fairly, Galbreath, Gilchrist, Knox, Newman, Patterson, Smylie, Torrey, Warren, Watson, Wilkinson, etc.

The period between 1820 and 1830 might be called the romance days of the old Scotch settlement. Everything was young and bright, fresh and full of life and vigor. The country abounded in game, and the streams in fish. The lowlands and the hills were covered with canebrakes. Farming was an easy matter at that day. Burn away the brakes, plant your corn and you were sure of a harvest.

This was the period of camp-meetings, when people would assemble from far and wide, camp out for ten or twelve days and hear the gospel from the best men in the church. The influence of these meetings for good can never be calculated. Through their agency a great many were born into the kingdom.

The first pastor of Union Church was Rev. William Montgomery. He began his pastorate in 1820 and closed in 1848. After him came Angus McCallum, John H. Smylie, Thomas Cleland and Samuel Montgomery. These served the church for just a few years each. The present pastor, Rev. C. W. Grafton, came to this church in June, 1872. After spending three months as a licentiate, he went back to the seminary and finished the senior course, returning the first of June,

1873. In July of this year he was ordained and installed pastor of Union Church.

This pastoral charge included Bensalem, a church nine miles distant, which was mainly an offshoot of the old church.

Now, if you will allow me to lay aside the stately third personal pronoun, and speak in the first person, saying I and me occasionally, during the balance of this discourse, it will make the speech easier. Indeed, the only value of this discourse is in the personal element, and the speaker is in the hand of his brethren.

I studied at Columbia Seminary in the class of T. L. Haman, McFarland, McKay, McAlpin, Chichester and some others. I was licensed by the Presbytery of Central Mississippi and from them received a letter of dismissal to the Presbytery of Mississippi.

During these years the Presbytery of Mississippi has been enlarged in some directions and narrowed in others; but Union Church has remained pretty nearly the geographical center of the Presbytery, and the preacher on horseback has had access to the country all around.

The Preaching of Forty Years

For forty-three years except the last three or four, the order of service on Sunday has been Sunday School at ten o'clock, preaching at eleven, then go home, eat dinner and spend the evening in private reading and family devotions. The Agricultural High School of the county, however, has come to Union Church recently, and since its advent we have had a second service at night. And then we had a mid-week service for a long time on Wednesday afternoons, and afterwards on Saturday afternoons. The above has been the regular, systematic order through all these years more or less, except on communion occasions. The staple of the preaching has been mainly doctrinal.

In 1873 Dr. Palmer visited Columbia Seminary and delivered a fine address to the student body. He spoke of Westminster Calvinism in the loftiest terms and some of us have never forgotten it. And for all these years at Union Church the fundamentals of Theology have been proclaimed. To wit: the doctrines of original sin, man's total depravity, God's sovereign will, eternal election of a multitude

that no man can number, a definite atonement by Jesus Christ the Son of God for His people, irresistible grace in the regeneration of the soul, and the final, certain perseverance of the saints. These are sometimes called dry bones of theology, but our people have not found it so. These doctrines go to the very bottom of human nature and set forth God in His beauty and glory, and country people love these great truths, and it would do you good to hear them discuss these great themes. In reading over the old records the young preacher was startled to see how a certain member was arraigned before the session on the charge of the "Arian Heresy." How could even the name "Arianism" have reached these country people? But here it was in black and white and the case was solemnly adjudicated by these stern old Scotch elders.

Calvinism presents God as standing before the sinner, demanding his surrender and offering infinite mercy. These truths make up the conquering gospel. Along with the doctrinal, following Paul's example, we have had the practical. And the great themes of Sabbath observance and the training of children, the religious home, the Abrahamic covenant, the duty of prayer, and generally all the commandments of the Decalogue as the rule of life, have been set forth.

And then, too, at stated times, the ordinance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, have furnished the finest field for thought and devotion.

Along with all these, the biographical has had its due share of notice. Adam and Eve, and Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, Moses and Aaron and Miriam and Joshua. Then in later history, John Wesley, George Whitefield, David Livingstone and others have all claimed attention from a body of eager listeners.

It might seem that in a long pastorate a preacher would find a dearth of themes; but the Bible can never be exhausted, and today the pastures are just as green and the topics are just as numerous and hearers are just as attentive as they were forty years ago. The farther one goes into the King's garden, the more he sees and wants to see. The Scripture is a deep well and the country preacher has never gotten to the bottom of it.

Then as to the style of preaching, Dr. Girardeau once told a body of students never to be hampered by rules of rhetoric. Let rules teach you but never bind