

St. Andrew Presbyterian
Albuquerque, NM

June 8, 2008
Rev. Frank Yates

ON OTHERS' SHOULDERS
Matthew 9:9-13

My wife Sharon was born here in Albuquerque at Presbyterian Hospital a number of years ago. How many-I won't say. Now the fact Sharon was born here may not sound so unusual. After all, a number of you and your family members were also born at Presbyterian Hospital. The exceptional part is that there IS a Presbyterian Hospital in our city. In fact, it is celebrating its 100th birthday this year.

There is a Presbyterian Hospital here, because Presbyterian missionaries came to our state-then a territory-in the second half of the Nineteenth Century. They would eventually establish medical facilities like the Mora Valley Medical Unit and the Embudo Hospital in Dixon and ours in Albuquerque. And babies are still born here and cared for and people receive medical care.

Hardly a week goes by that I am not in the Presbyterian Hospital. Every time I go there I give thanks for every person who has ever received help in that hospital. And I thank God for the other Presbyterian hospitals throughout the state as well as the Presbyterian Medical Service in the rural areas.

Today we give thanks for the remarkable gift that the Presbyterian Church has given to northern New Mexico. The gift of hospitals and medical care. The gift of schools and education. The gift of caring Christians and congregations. The gift of Ghost Ranch in Abiqui and in Santa Fe. The coming of the Presbyterians to the Land of Enchantment is a truly splendid story. This past week I reviewed several wonderful publications from the Menaul Historical Library. These books tell the story of what Presbyterians have done among us over the last 138 or so years. I love church history and this week I have been immersed in church history-our church's story in New Mexico.

It all began when the Board of Domestic Missions of the Presbyterian Church sent Rev. D. F. McFarland to Santa Fe in 1866. The Civil War had just ended and U.S. Army troops were stationed there. Rev. McFarland met with thirty or forty persons in the governor's residence for a time of worship. This missionary had been sent west with a strategy: "By gaining an influence over young minds he may be able to reach the adults." Now that would be the strategy for most if not all of the Presbyterian missionaries sent

to New Mexico. Educate and care for the youth and thus reach the adults. It would often be a hard sell in a land dominated by the Roman Catholic Church. Remember that this was the pre-Vatican II church that did not take kindly to Protestants. In fact, as McFarland's work in Santa Fe progressed, the bishop publicly denounced this Protestant school and threatened to excommunicate all who attended it.

The tension between Protestant and Catholic in New Mexico cannot be overlooked. Perhaps it reached its high point in the late 1940's regarding yet another school issue, this time in Dixon. In 1947 Dixon's public school children were moved to the parochial school building without the consent of the people. The Roman Catholic catechism was taught by the nuns who were employed as public school teachers. Eventually the school children were moved to a new public school building, but the nuns were maintained as paid teachers.

That's when the Presbyterians joined with other community leaders to file suit against the school board. In fact, twenty-eight other schools joined in the suit against the school board. In 1951 the State Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Presbyterians and others who brought suit. Eventually the Diocese of Santa Fe formed its own parochial schools when the teaching of religion in the public schools was banned.

On a happier note, several years ago Presbyterians and Catholics met in Dixon for a service of reconciliation. Our executive Presbyterian Jim Collie and Archbishop Michael Sheehan pledged to live in harmony and cooperation-thus officially ending the tension that stretched back to Rev. McFarland and his school for children in Santa Fe.

Schools are what Presbyterians do. The earliest missionaries established schools all over northern New Mexico. We went to the Indian reservations like Laguna and established schools and churches. We went to Chacon and Chimayo and began schools. We went to Las Vegas and started a school. We were the educational missionaries for the Land of Enchantment.

The story of Alice Hyson in Ranchos de Taos is quite moving. In 1884 Alice Hyson moved to begin work in this very poor part of Taos, long before there was a ski resort. As this twenty-three year old woman noted, "How different from everything I had left in Pennsylvania!" Indeed. She had to learn Spanish. And she had to deal with the incredibly primitive conditions in the school and the village.

In those days parents did not send their girls to school. Alice Hyson won over the reluctant parents by offering a sewing class and the girls did not want to miss out. With her winning smile and marvelous personality,

Ms. Hyson finally helped build a new school building with two classrooms and four rooms for teachers' quarters. She secured playground equipment and planted trees. The children and their parents came to love the school and Ms. Hyson loved them as well.

One of the amazing things about her ministry in Ranchos de Taos is that she formed a debating society. Sharon and I just saw that terrific movie "The Great Debaters" about an African-American debating team in the 1930's. And so I was thrilled to read that Ms. Hyson formed a team to debate the Taos team. Crowds coming for the debate were so large there wasn't even standing room available. Amazing what a great teacher can call forth from her students!

It is poignant to read of Alice Hyson finally having to leave her beloved children due to ill health. In 1915 a horse drawn carriage came to Ranchos de Taos to carry Ms. Hyson to Santa Fe. Many of her friends, according to the accounts, "embraced her again and again. Alice Hyson with tears in her eyes embraced her friends. She was helped to the carriage. All wanted to be near her for the last moments. The carriage pulled away. Then silently her friends walked away."

I wish we had more time to talk about the long and rich history of the Allison-James school in Santa Fe-the upshot of Rev. McFarland's first school. The story of Matilda Allison is marvelous. She came to Santa Fe in 1881 and worked there for twenty-two years. Eventually the school was turned over to the Presbyterian Board of Pensions to be used as a retirement home for ministers. Plaza Resolana became home for many ministers and their spouses and is still in use today.

We could spend all of this morning talking about the enormous gift that Ghost Ranch has been to northern New Mexico and indeed to the entire Presbyterian Church. How many Jim Hall stories there are floating around New Mexico! Jim Hall, for so many years the director of Ghost Ranch, was the guy who offered Georgia O'Keefe a place to stay at the ranch. How often I have enjoyed its magnificent scenery along the Chama River. I know that for many of you, it is an enchanted place, sacred ground. For the long and wonderful ministry of Ghost Ranch we give thanks.

And time does not permit to tell the story of Rev. James Menaul coming to our community. Menaul School has been "educating for life" since the 1880's-a remarkable longevity. To read the stories of how Menaul impacted the lives of so many racial ethnic students from the northern part of the state is very uplifting. I have talked to many of my Presbyterian friends here in the city who cannot be more thankful for what Menaul did for them

as youth. Sometimes we need to just pause and give thanks for the myriad of ways that Menaul has blessed our city and our state.

One thing strikes me about this story of our church coming to New Mexico. Christians inspired by the Good News of Jesus came to a rather primitive land with an amazing spirit. There was certainly no glory to be gained by coming to a territory that wasn't even a state. Like Presbyterians all over the world, they left rather comfortable settings to come to a place that had not yet gained the status of "the land of enchantment." They came to people who were remarkably poor and needy. And they stayed and they gave their very lives for this effort. I love the fact that the Presbyterian Church has often gone to places without prestige, without wealth, without power. We go because Jesus sends us to the "least of these".

Our passage from Matthew's Gospel tells us that people questioned why Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. And this is how Jesus replied to his critics: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but the sinners." That is what motivated Jesus to seek out those who had no advocate, those who lived on the margins.

The Presbyterians who came here beginning in 1866 did so because they felt this call of Jesus to reach out to those in need. They brought the Good News, they brought schools, they brought medical care. They brought themselves and we are benefactors of their service. We need to remember that these brothers and sisters in Christ felt themselves called to this mission. They felt compelled to ride trains and buggies to this remote part of the world, a world as Alice Hyson discovered was a whole lot different than Pennsylvania! And their "works do follow them".

What we can learn from this marvelous story of Presbyterians coming to New Mexico is that the church lives by its mission. As long as we hear that unsettling call of Jesus to reach out to those who have need of a physician, then the church will live. Our future-if it is to be blessed-calls us to give ourselves away in mission to the "least of these". The blessing of the past is to show us the way to the future, the future of Jesus Christ who "came not to call the righteous but sinners." The past teaches us it is in mission that we will have a future. Thanks be to God for a rich heritage, a wonderful past, and a blessed future in the mission of Jesus Christ. Amen.