

A LENTEN REFLECTION

By Jane McClure

The “stay-at-home” order has me doing just that, sorting boxes of things. We will have one huge vintage linens sale when Hamline Church Women/United Methodist Women’s markets resume.

One box contained a pair of small white gloves, my last bit of childhood Easter finery.

There are five McClure Girls, four of us born within a five-year span. That was a lot of little faces to wash and hair to braid. If younger people wonder why older church women can expertly tie apron bows behinds our backs, we had considerable practice with little puffy-sleeved, sashed dresses.

The gloves may have been from a grandmother. We were much more farm girls than little ladies, despite her best efforts.

Childhood was a time of dressing up for church, especially for Easter. We complained about shoes that pinched and not getting dirty.

But go back several generations and most of our ancestors didn’t dress up at all. Most people had one set of work clothes for work and one set of church or go-to-town clothes. Only the wealthy could don beautiful, handmade garb.

The Industrial Revolution and mass-produced clothing changed social status and what we wore. But some faiths resisted the chance to dress up, including Methodists.

Our founder John Wesley spoke against “adornment” and finery. One of his memorable statements is, “Let your dress be cheap as well as plain.”

Wesley wrote detailed guidelines telling Methodists what to wear, in terms of colors, fabrics and even shapes and sizes of sleeves, coats and hats. He gave advice on hairstyles. He would have looked askance at Easter parades.

While we can joke about Wesley missing out on the era of makeovers and What Not to Wear, we remember that Methodists and other grassroots faiths used condemnation of finery as social protest. Our ancestors wanted a more egalitarian society. Some renounced sin by discarding fine clothes and jewelry.

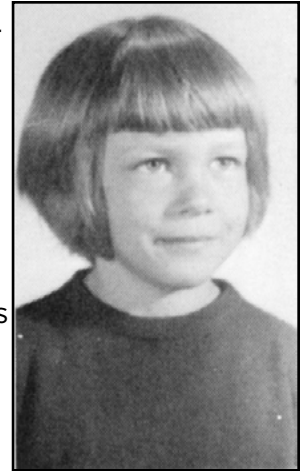
I grew up with older adults who observed Wesley’s message. Ladies old enough to be my great-grandmother wore plain dresses, with a colorful costume jewelry pin on Sunday. Men, including my farmer father, had one good suit.

We Klemme UMC Sunday School children learned that Jesus wore simple clothes. One Lenten lesson was about how after Jesus was crucified; his clothing was divided. Lots were cast to see who got his tunic. Miss Leona Lau, our long-suffering Sunday School teacher, explained that casting lots was gambling. (Another sin!)

At Hamline Methodist, we come to church as we are. As our church is in the forefront for gender and acceptance, we make statements with buttons and T-shirts expressing our beliefs. What we wear still expresses egalitarianism.

I’ll miss Palm Sunday and Easter services, seeing excited children in their best garb. But I’ll remember Samuel 16:7, and the message that God doesn’t judge our material or physical appearance. God looks upon the heart, and as we heed the Lenten call to reflect on our inner reality and spirituality, we are humbled.

And I don’t even need to wear white gloves ...



Jane as a child