

“Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’ ”  
*Exodus 32:13*

### **Redlined Pasadena**

When people ask me how I’m doing, I’m not sure how detailed my answer should be. But the good news is that my health is good enough that I’m now circling back and doing the medical procedures that were scheduled for January, but got canceled because of the fire.

One such appointment was this last Thursday. After a year, I was able to get my glaucoma checked. (Though it’s described as “moderate,” I have never noticed having glaucoma, but I watch it because it’s a hereditary weakness for many Japanese-Americans.) The good news is that the tests did not show any change in my glaucoma or even my regular vision.

I was most interested in this visit, though, because my ophthalmologist moved into the grand new Doheny Eye Institute facility with the address of 150 N. Orange Grove Blvd. in Pasadena. Though the address says Orange Grove, the facility is accessed by turning onto a little stub of a street called Kensington Place, and that is the original location of my family church. The church that we know of as First Presbyterian Church, Altadena, moved to Lincoln Avenue when Kensington Place was condemned to make way for the 210 freeway. My family didn’t even realize there was still a Kensington Place, and there isn’t much left.

The story of the old Pasadena Union Church is a glimpse into the racial history of Pasadena. In Pasadena, there were two main districts that were redlined, [D6](#) and [D9](#). In my childhood, most of the Black, Japanese, and Mexican residents of Pasadena lived in D6, near John Muir High School. But in earlier days, when my uncle played high school football with Jackie Robinson, many of our ancestors lived in D9, which starts at Orange Grove just north of what is now the Norton Simon Museum. It follows a very thin strip south, then widens around Del Mar Blvd. and includes the blocks along the western side of Fair Oaks down to Huntington Hospital. According to the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (a New Deal federal agency founded in 1935 to shore up home ownership after the Depression that also established the redlining maps), D6’s demographics were about 10% “foreign,” Mexican and Japanese (though many were born in the US) and 40% “Negro.” In D9, the residents were 15% Mexican and Japanese and 40% Black. However, these neighborhoods are adjacent to some of the wealthiest areas; my family church was a few blocks from the Gamble House. They were so close to wealth, but distant enough that much of D9 became the path of the 710 stub (my ancestors obviously didn’t have the political clout of the people of South Pasadena.)

If you read about Jackie Robinson’s childhood, he mentions growing up with Black, Japanese, and Mexican kids. The old-timers at my family church knew that while the Japanese kids went to Pasadena Union Church, the Robinson family was active at Scott Methodist Church, which is around the corner from the Gamble House—but they all went to school together. (I think Scott was saved from demolition because they are right on Orange Grove Blvd., which of course was preserved from the freeway.)

Why do I go into this detail? Partly because we have been looking at the connection between land and community strength . . . Partly because as I get older and look towards retirement, I wonder how we will retain the stories of our history . . . Partly because we need to know that there is great richness in

the history of our people that should empower and challenge us as we face difficult times today. For instance, as we discuss the importance of affordable housing and access to financial resources, I know that my family church started as housing for Japanese migrant workers and students, was used as a temporary shelter for Japanese families returning from the World War II camps, and that the church started its own savings and loan for their members because the commercial banks would not give them mortgages. These actions on behalf of Christians from decades ago played a key role in the recovery and development of my people, whom the US government described as “enemy alien” and a “subversive race” who “infiltrated” neighborhoods to turn them into slums.

Who are now being described in these degrading ways today? And what are we church folk doing about it? And how will this impact our—and their—descendants?

There is a phrase oft-used in the Japanese-American community, *kodomo no tame ni*—“for the sake of the children.” As we consider the generations that came before us, the ancestors of faith who acted bravely for the sake of God’s children, may we be open to God’s leading, for the sake of God’s children in our presence today.

And may we be inspired and emboldened by the loving grace of Christ in our lives.

Blessings,

*Wendy*