

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FAITH

Psalm 127: 1-2
II Corinthians 5: 14-21

Faith Community
November 18, 2001

Introduction

As we celebrate our twenty-fifth anniversary it is a wonderful time to remember some of the most important moments in our life together, and to recall some of the fun, and funny times, and poignant moments we've had. We can also reflect on the difficult times we have been through together.

I realize, of course, that not everyone has been here for all the events we will talk about today, but they are nevertheless important.

In a very real way it is like family stories that we tell and remember in our extended family. I wasn't around when it happened, but I love to hear the stories about how my father's father wrote a poem to my mother, when she and my dad were engaged.

I never met him but I am interested in the stories about my mother's uncle who was a ship captain, and his adventures at sea. Even though I wasn't there, those stories helped define who I am, and who this family is that I am part of. The stories helped me understand myself in a larger context.

So hopefully knowing our stories as a church family helps us see better who we are and where we have come from.

I

The place to begin is twenty-five years ago, at the kitchen table at Linda Crawford's house - three houses ago in Novi. The congregation discussion followed, then John surprised everyone by saying, "I move that it be the policy of Faith Community Presbyterian Church to give 20% of all the monies we receive from this congregation to mission causes outside of this church."

There was a stunned silence. Then the immediate questions came - how would that be possible, we don't have much money to start with, shouldn't we be sure we're on our feet before we give money away for other people?

The discussion went on for quite some time, and in the end the steering committee voted 'yes' on his motion, and decided to try it. "If it doesn't work out we can always change our policy," they said, "but if we never try, we'll never know."

I am very proud of you because in twenty-five years we have never given less than 20% of our operating fund for missions beyond our congregation. In total we have now given something like three quarters of a million dollars for people in serious need. That is a strong witness to the One we serve.

II

I remember in one of our early worship services in the Village Oaks school gym. We had a baptism that day, and when the family, and elder Clay Perry, came forward for the baptism, I lifted the lid from the baptismal bowl, only to see that there was no water in it.

The look on my face had to be one of shock, but Clay remained calm. Very ceremoniously he took the baptismal bowl, turned and walked to the back of the gym, to the drinking fountain, and filled the bowl with water. The fountain made a loud spraying sound that could be heard throughout the gym, but everyone ignored that.

When the bowl was full Clay came back to the front and presented the bowl for baptism. I don't remember who the child was, and I don't remember if it screamed, but it surely might have because the water was ice cold!

III

I think back to a Christmas children's pageant several years ago. The family of the boy playing Joseph had gone out for dinner before the play. Something that he ate didn't agree with him at all.

Even though no one in the audience knew it, throughout the play he was becoming more and more uncomfortable. Finally, it became more than he could contain. Being a true actor he carefully, and seemingly very compassionately, leaned into the manger, down to the baby Jesus' face. Then he let it all go. He threw up on baby Jesus!

He turned his head away from the audience, wiped his mouth with his sleeve, and stood beside the smelly manger, as if nothing had happened. And most people didn't know anything had happened, until the next wave hit him. This time he had to make a hasty exit through the side door.

I'll never forget the year Joseph threw up on the head of baby Jesus. We were all thankful we had used a doll that year!

IV

Today I think of the faithful, diligent people who don't say too much, but have been true and loyal to Faith Community. I call them "Salt of the Earth People." They are the people who are here day in and day out, doing what they can to help this congregation thrive.

They are the people you know you can call on, and if it's possible they will help. They are the ones who never get the attention they deserve, they are mostly quiet and in the background.

They are there for this congregation, and they are positive. They are also the ones who would be surprised to be called "Salt of the Earth People."

We have suffered some real losses as a church family. We have had to bury an infant only one day old. In the early days of our congregation, we lost a young boy who suffered multiple handicaps. We have agonized through the loss of a young boy who had just started school, and more recently a young man who had just graduated from high school.

The life of a budding young politician of incredible integrity was struck down, though for months he continued in a coma. Many of our older members have left us. We miss their wisdom and friendship.

Each loss has hurt us deeply and left its scar. But we live on the promises of God, and trust in our future with God. Though we miss each one, we trust that they are with God; and we look forward to a time of glad heavenly reunion.

Conclusion

Twenty-five years ago about a hundred people gathered in the gymnasium of Village Oaks Elementary School. A few knew each other, they had been planning for this occasion for months, but most of the people there were strangers.

We had borrowed chairs from the Presbyterian Church in Northville, found some offering plates, and we were given a grant to be able to purchase hymnbooks.

A new church development before us had given us a large wooden table on wheels, which had sliding doors on the back, so that we could store the hymnbooks and offering plates inside. Every week we rolled that table out, unpacked it, and used it for our communion table.

The people gathered together on that day were pioneers, even if they didn't know it. They were beginning something, and they didn't have any idea where it was going to go. They didn't know then IF it was going to go.

What has come from that first day? God has called together faithful people to serve Christ in this area. People around us have seen who we are, and what we stand for and have come to join us in this adventure of faith.

Children learn about Christ in a culture where that won't automatically happen anymore. On Sundays and mid-week they learn the stories of the Bible and how to apply them to their own lives.

Youth pull together to explore their faith, to share with each other their concerns in living that faith; they have someone to help them, listen to them, and support them.

Adults give their time tirelessly not only to teach our children, but also to cook for them, drive them, help them make crafts, and plan activities that will help faith form at the center of their lives. These adults also study, and learn, and grow in their faith at the same time.

That service twenty-five years ago began an incredible family of faith. You are faithful people of integrity, thoughtfulness, compassion, and prayer.

We know who we are, we know whom we serve. We pray for God's continuing presence in our life together, so that we can grow and serve Christ more effectively.

Amen