

"There's No Place Like Home"

[based on Acts 2]

Once again, Happy 168th Anniversary!

How many here enjoy having birthdays and getting another year older? I'm not even going to ask who the oldest person is!

But, just think about all of the changes that have taken place in our lifetime.

Do you realize NASA had less computing power when they landed a man on the moon, than the power found today in a cell-phone? The first computer was called ENIAC ... Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer. It was 8 feet high, 3 feet deep, and 80 feet long, and it weighed nearly 30 tons – try putting that in your pocket!

We live in a generation that has seen us shift from home phones with rotary dials and party lines to car phones that answer while we drive and even read text messages aloud through the speakers.

Most cars don't even have ignition keys anymore - everything is electronic.

This morning we are gathered here to celebrate this community and this building, built circa 1854. Both have witnessed many changes through the years.

Since our church was founded, our country has had 23 prime ministers and hosted the Olympics Games 8 times. There have been countless advances in technology and healthcare.

Our society has undergone drastic transformations... in clothing styles, ethics, morals, laws and so many other things.

Through all of this passage of time, there is one thing, however, that has never changed, and that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel, the Bible, the Word of GOD is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Malachi 3:6 states "...I am the Lord; I do not change."

While we are mindful today of the history of this church, I think we should go back a little further in time and witness the beginning of THE CHURCH.

Our reading today was from Acts. The events described there, occurred 50 days following the Jewish Passover when Jesus was crucified. This was already a Jewish festival that brought the Jews back to Jerusalem.

The 11 disciples were on an emotional roller coaster. They had seen Jesus enter Jerusalem triumphantly during the Palm Sunday parade, then followed, in the blink of an eye, by His trial and murder.

Many of them left town disappointed, thinking they had believed in a false hope. But three days later, they saw a resurrected Jesus, and their faith was restored. They looked forward to a coming kingdom of God as they stayed with Jesus another 40 days. But then Jesus ascended into heaven, promising to send a comforter, the Holy Spirit.

Now, the disciples were back in Jerusalem, scared for their lives, hiding together in, most likely, the same room where the Last Supper was eaten.

The Roman and Jewish officials were still very much aware of the recent events of the Passover. The believers were undoubtedly being watched by both parties to make sure that no other disturbances took place.

Altogether, including the 11 disciples, there were about 120 friends and family members who believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

And when the Day of Pentecost came, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit who gave them the ability to "speak with other tongues" ... words they didn't know, but were understood by the crowds outside, each in his or her own language. Then the people who received those words were baptized, and about three thousand converts were added to their following on that day.

They continued in the apostles' fellowship and doctrine, breaking bread and praying together. But let's not paint an unrealistic picture... There were still feelings of disappointment between members, even though these folks loved each other and shared a common faith. Some were bound to have felt alone and afraid of what the future would hold. On that Sunday morning, just 49 days since the resurrection of Jesus, that small group in the upper room, experienced these same feelings.

That day marked the beginning, the birth-date of the Christian Church. It began with a small group of believers and has grown to reach around the globe and to shape the course of world history.

Now, a word about God's timing. During the feast of the Passover, a time when a Jewish Priest would offer a perfect and spotless lamb's blood as a sacrifice to commemorate Jewish freedom from bondage, Jesus became that perfect lamb, freeing us all from our sins - past, present and future.

At this Passover Festival, which coincided with the first harvest of the season, the first souls of the Church were gathered. The super-natural power of the Holy Spirit that was witnessed on that day, brought about major changes, including the birth of the Christian Church.

However, it was a hostile time to be a Christian. They were ridiculed and mocked by those around them. People they considered friends and family thought they were crazy. The government conspired against them.

By the time chapter 4 in the book of Acts begins, we find that Peter and John have already been arrested. When you think about it, it was a time that is not all that much different from today. People still long to hear the simple message of the Gospel. Christians are still publicly ridiculed. Family and friends may still think we are crazy for believing in a risen Saviour. And the government is still trying to force us to give up our beliefs or be penalized in the marketplace.

Today, we celebrate 168 years of our personal witness as Presbyterians, here in Stirling, marking our stand as a Christian Church, founded by Jesus through the Holy Spirit, that began so many years ago.

We are right to remember the past and we honour all of the many good people who have come through these doors before us, and their contributions to this church and also to this community.

168 years is a very long time...but our work here is not done. Our task is the same today as it was for Peter on that day of Pentecost. It is the same as the founding members of this church held in their hearts. We are to continue spreading the good news of Jesus Christ to anyone who will gather to listen. **We** are the Christian church.

Hymn 475 in our Book of Praise reminds us that:

*The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple,
The church is not a resting place, the church is a **people**.*

*At Pentecost some people, received the Holy Spirit,
And told the Good News through the world, to all who would hear it...*

I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together...

I have acted as pulpit supply in many churches and I have noticed a common thread ... the majority of folks in the pews have grey hair. Yes, the membership in many mainline churches is diminishing, but we are never too old to carry on speaking in our own "tongues".

Go back with me, if you will, to a familiar story found in the second chapter of Luke. Every year Jesus' parents made the trip from their home in Nazareth to the city of Jerusalem for the festival of Passover. On this annual event, when Jesus was twelve years old, Mary and Joseph and their relatives and close friends were travelling altogether back home, when Mary noticed that Jesus was not within the group.

For three days they searched and searched, going all the way back to Jerusalem, asking people along the way if they had seen Jesus. At long last they found him. He was in the temple, speaking with the Rabbis and amazing them with his knowledge.

They admonished Jesus for not staying with them. His reply? "Where else would I be but here in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49) He was at **home**, doing his Father's business.

In 'The Wizard of Oz', Dorothy is restless throughout the tale. She had so many adventures, so many difficulties to overcome and had met so many odd people. She longed to be back in that place where all felt "right". She was *home*-sick. Glinda, the Good Witch, wants nothing more than for this young girl to be happy and settled. She told Dorothy, wearing her ruby slippers, of course, to begin clicking her heels together and say, "There's no place like home...there's no place like home." And she got her wish!

All of you have many memories of the past, in a church near and dear to your hearts. Why? Think about what brings a smile to your face when you think of "church". Let **your** tongue share **your** story; share the times Jesus has come to **your** rescue; invite a friend or neighbour to share what church means to you.

Every church is a family, and the older we get, realistically, the more we shouldn't be alone. Here we find fellowship, and more importantly, friendship.

In the eight years that Sherry and I have been worshipping within these walls, you have become a part of our extended family. This church has left an indelible imprint on our hearts already. My tongue speaks of you often and I cannot help but feel blessed to be among folks who give of their time and talents sacrificially.

Friends, there is no place like home! In this place we all share a common story. Our St. Andrew's home is a big part of our collective history. Embrace it as our story continues, and may God bless you all richly. Amen