

Sermon: Celebrating with Faith

Celebrating a church anniversary is a special occasion that allows our congregation to be able to reflect on God's faithfulness, his provision, and the journey this church has taken over these many years. It's our time to honour the years of ministry, rejoice in the good work done in the community, and look forward to the future with hope and expectation.

It is such an honor and a privilege to be here to join in the celebration of the church's 170th Anniversary. I am a firm believer in everything happens for a reason, good or bad, and although I wouldn't normally have been scheduled to preach today, Paul wanted to change Sundays with me this month, so here I am.

Anniversaries are good times for remembering. We can all sit back and ponder about the people who were present when this congregation was first organized. We wonder what were they like? What motivated them? Do you think they could have anticipated all the changes that have taken place in the community, the congregation, or society? Whatever stories you can add as members of the congregation will help us all to give those of us gathered here today, a picture of what that original congregation may have looked like.

Do you think that the founders of St. Andrews would have or could have ever imagined that this congregation would still be here, 170 years later? Hold on to that question, I will come back to it.

These are some instructions to consider when serving in the purpose of Godly living.

The church needs to have a clear identity given by God!

It consists of a community with the experience of grace.

It is an inclusive community.

It is a community of careful teachers.

It is a community with knowledge and acceptance of fear of failure.

I truly believe that this church and its congregants fully understand these instructions.

We all know that although a congregation was officially formed in 1854, it was March 1856, when they welcomed their first full-time minister, Rev. Alexander Buchan.

Construction had already begun to erect a church building on this site, and here, on Nov 12th, 1856, the Presbytery formally inducted Rev. Buchan into this charge. It was the beginning of a faith filled congregation and community.

Our church anniversary serves as an altar of remembrance. It holds stories of our humblest prayers and our mightiest victories. It's here that we recall God's promises and respond with faith, knowing that he will hear from heaven.

This church anniversary, we are reminded of the importance of a firm and unwavering faith. We have seen God's faithfulness in our lives and in the life of this church. It is by our faith that we stand strong and continue to grow.

Let us hold onto our beliefs with confidence, knowing that he who promised is faithful. Let us stand firm in the face of trials and challenges, trusting in God's strength and guidance. Our faith is what sets us apart and it is what will continue to carry us forward.

Our church's anniversary is a reminder of God's perfect guidance that leads us through the uncertain terrains of life. It points us to the power of God's Word, which illuminates our path, providing the direction and strength we need to continue our pilgrimage.

We have followed God's word for the past 170 years, and we will continue to build our church upon God's word for the years to come. We know that as we do, God will light our path and guide our feet in his steps. We know that with him as our guide, we will not go astray.

We must remember that we are more than a faithful and spiritual group of individuals that gather for worship on Sunday mornings. The outreach and community involvement are a huge part of the foundation of our continuing faith as strong Christians.

We have the Helping Hands group, who knit, crochet and sew. They make items for various missions and charities and support 'Grace Inn', People

Helping People of Centre Hastings, Belleville General Hospital, Keep Kids Warm, Heart of Hastings Hospice, One Plane Away in Nunavut and Grandmother's Heart in Kenya.

We have the Presbee's group that helps with multitudes of tasks whenever they can within the church and community. They host fundraising events throughout the year and help with mission work locally, provincially and worldwide.

The PCW/WMS group had a INDSPIRE mission table that displayed beautiful items for sale, with the proceeds being used to encourage our Indigenous people to complete their schooling and go into professions that will enrich their lives. They oversee the regular Coffee and Muffins Day every third Thursday in the church hall. They help with the coffee time after Sunday services.

The group also provides receptions for Celebrations of Life, Baptisms and Birthdays and take an active part in our Spring Yard Sale.

Of course, there is a dedicated group of people who form part of Session and the Board of Managers, to ensure the church runs smoothly.

Although twice in its history, St. Andrew's was part of a two-point charge with West Huntingdon, Stirling has been a self-sustaining congregation since 2006.

An anniversary is a vital signpost in the life of a church. Just as the Israelites would celebrate God's great faithfulness and deliverance, so should we commemorate and give thanks for the ways God has led us and blessed us.

We are encouraged to stand firm in our faith, holding onto God's promises and following his perfect guidance. As we do so, we can be confident that he will continue to lead us forward, building his church and spreading his love to all those around us.

For years to come, we must continue to seek his face and turn from our sinful ways, trusting in his forgiveness and healing. We must never forget the power of prayer and the faithfulness of our God. He has always answered us when we called upon him and he always will.

Being citizens and members of the household of God is an important thing. We ought to not take that lightly. God does not invite us to fill a seat in a building or a name on a roll, but he invites us to join his kingdom and his family.

He also invites us to become something magnificent that he is building. The Church is not a building with a steeple, or a business that serves your desires, or a club with many perks. The Church is God's people who are saved by his grace.

And that is what God has built here in Stirling, with St. Andrew's.

God has built something wonderful. It is called the Church. He has laid the foundation. He has placed the cornerstone. He has assembled living stones of this structure, and he is adding more.

God is building his Church, but he is using us to do the work. Each of God's people has a responsibility to build up and disciple others.

While, discipleship begins in the home, it does not end there. Each person in the Church can help shape the future of other members of the household of God. Each one of us ought to support and help each other by teaching and modeling Jesus Christ. God's work of building his Temple includes us.

I don't know about you, but I do believe in this church. I think among human communities, our church is the most beautiful place and now I see why God chose to have a church built here. So I truly believe in this church and its congregation, not necessarily as an institution, but as living body, as a living community. We have all come together here.

Let us continue to build this church beautifully together. Small hands that you give, they matter. In the future years before us, let us build a beautiful church together. Let us continue to build.

Let us work hard. You don't come to church just for yourself. You come to church to build community. You are doing valuable things, worthy things in your life. If we build this church together. Let us have confidence in God who began a good work here at St. Andrew's.

Celebrating the 170th anniversary today for the St. Andrew's congregation is living proof that the family in this congregation have and will continue to be used as God's tools and disciples, to strengthen this temple for many, many more years to come.

Oh yes, the question that I asked at the beginning of this message, "Do you think that the founders of St. Andrews would have or could have ever imagined that this congregation would still be here, 170 years later?"

Of course, they did. They were the generation of strong, faithful believers, that new that God would always be a part of this church and congregation. Their Christian faith was as important as air was to their lives.

They didn't have the 21st century lack of faith, and denial of our Lord and Saviour. It is more important than ever, for us to be strong disciples and share the Word of Christ to the world.

May the Lord continue to bless this congregation and its works in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, for another 170 years. Amen