

The Gift of Yesterday Blesses Today...

Each Sunday that we get together here, there seems to be something we celebrate, commemorate or dedicate! Worship in essence, is a celebration – of our ability to come together and share our common worries, happiness, anxieties and of course, joys. On a day when this country celebrates Memorial Day, we have a reason to also celebrate who we are, where we came from, and those who came before us. So that brings us to the first question: Who are we?

We learn from the people who helped build this congregation and this town. Like most who came to the New World, the faithful who came to this area sought the freedom to worship and live as Christians, namely, Congregationalists. They embraced the ideal that everyone could have an equal voice and vote. It is the basis of what we call Congregational Polity, a democratic leadership – which became the basis for the system of government is the way it is today. They built their community on the cornerstone of faith – the example of Jesus at the center, the Bible at the core.

Today we are grounded on that same cornerstone...the one the builder's rejected. We continue to examine the Bible. We listen for the word of God. We take little bits in to apply it our personal lives. We build on the cornerstone that guides us to share in worship and work in the community. All the while, our faith is woven into the fabric of our lives and influences how we as a people interact with our surroundings.

This is what Peter was telling his listeners. They were now a people, joined by a common bond through Jesus Christ. He reminded them of the Israelites, slaves in Egypt, with no common or national identity. Once they were freed, they became a people of God. This was their new identity. ¹⁰*Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

Peter was writing during a time when simply having the identity of Christian meant at the least you were a second class citizen of Rome, and at the worst, sure persecution. Peter's words have lifted up many through the ages, especially those in slavery, or those without civil rights. These words are spiritual reminders to all of us who call ourselves Christians. We live in this world. We have to be careful not to become slaves *to* the world.

That brings us to a second question: How can we be followers of Jesus Christ, a people of God, and still live in this world?

We have come this far, by the grace and mercy of God. We will face today with the same resources available to us. Each of us have our faith, whether we are very far along or are just figuring it out. We have this congregation and this sacred space for worship to help support us along the way. The danger is, we can get used to it, even inured to the power of the Spirit that does indeed seep in each week. So, Peter's opening words are really a warning that we shouldn't

get too comfortable as a church. ²*Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—* ³*if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

We need to stay on our toes because there is always room for growth! We need help to live in this world that tempts and frustrates, entices and repels us.

Jesus says, ¹⁵*“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.*

John’s gospel gives some backbone to Peter’s reminders. Here is our help. The words of encouragement are not platitudes. They are based in the deep belief and knowledge that we have the power of the Holy Spirit to draw on in times of need. That Advocate Jesus spoke of? It’s not a weekly newspaper or a cheering section. This advocate has teeth. I know a woman who is a Court Advocate. Mary is the one who walks beside people to guide them (especially first offenders) through the confusion and the intimidation of facing a judge and sometimes jury. She doesn’t pull punches. She tells it like it is. She’s tough, yet compassionate. She is the lifeline for so many.

That is who Jesus, with God, has given us. The Advocate, the Spirit of truth, gives us hope and comfort, especially when we are met with threats. They may be different enemies than in Peter’s time: health, economic, social, temporal, national, or local problems. No matter what, that Spirit of accompanies us, abides with us, to give us strength when we are weak; help when we are failing; light when we have lost our way.

The world has changed in many ways since the cornerstone of this meetinghouse was laid. Yet much is still the same – the negatives and the positives. It is easy to come up with the negatives: war; poverty; crime. It is the positive side of things, though, that brings us here today. Like the first Christians, like our forebears who first met in the “Old Black Church”, like our sisters and brothers next to us, we are the Church! We are very much alive and worshiping and making a difference in the world. The Caesars are simply answers in crossword puzzles and questions on Jeopardy!

We are making history today, and will continue making history tomorrow in the way we proclaim God is still speaking in the world. We do this when we fit together to build on what we have been given. We make history today as we depend upon our Advocate and one another, still building today for tomorrow.