

WD September 9, 2024

The Purpose of Anniversaries

Anniversaries are wonderful things. This weekend we will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of Grace Lutheran's church building here on Klerner Lane.

The church has officially met as a congregation on four properties. The first place in 1927 was a rented room over a pool hall in downtown on State Street in New Albany. Each week members had to set up a borrowed organ, lectern, and hymnals. Folding chairs from Dieckman's funeral home were dropped off on Saturday afternoons and picked up on Mondays. A large coal-burning parlor furnace was used to heat the room and the coal that fueled it was carried from several blocks away by members. The members rented the hall for \$20.00 per month and met there for little over a year.

Then the congregation moved to a location to East 10th and Oak. It was here in 1930 that a one room school house was started in the basement with an enrollment of 18 students. Within a year it grew to 35 students.

Eventually the congregation moved to Charlestown Road in early 1950s where they bought the James Whitcome Riley School and refurbished it into a church. This location remains famous to former students of Grace. Many still talk about the teachers back then and the big metal slide out back. The slide was the old school kind that would bake your bottom because it would heat up in the sunshine. Growing again to 600 souls, the congregation bought the property on Klerner Lane in 1964 but would not build until 1974

Now, this year we celebrate being at Klerner Lane for 50 years, longer than all the other locations combined. We hope to celebrate the day with a rededication of the building, a congregational picture, and a big BBQ. Since the previous three locations all had a congregational picture taken in front of them and since none has ever been taken at the current location we want to honor our history with a bit of tradition. So, we intend to take a congregational picture. I hope that everyone can make it.

Anniversaries mean things. One of the oldest anniversaries still celebrated today is very much connected to our 50th anniversary. Consider Exodus 12. This is where the Lord gave the Israelites the Passover. Note what is said.

¹⁴“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance....”²⁴“Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants.”²⁵ When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony.²⁶ And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’²⁷ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’”

Did you catch it? “When children ask you...” Anniversaries teach each new generation. History is always a significant part of an anniversary. History keeps one grounded in the fact that generations before us helped establish what we now enjoy. History gives us roots, legacy, and a sense of belonging. The faithful group that started Grace, every week hauled coal for several blocks, hauled chairs upstairs, set up and took down a borrowed organ each week. Years later members of the congregation had the courage and foresight to buy 7 ½ acres on Klerner Lane in 1964. Many years of faithful acts all contributed to what is celebrated this weekend. At the same time such history reminds us that God was at work in these very people. We are rooted both in the essence of the Passover, namely Jesus, and also in the legacy of our predecessors.

For both the Israelites and for Grace what we learn is how the Lord blessed his people. We benefit for example from the Passover, in that the Lord, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away our sin. The central message of Grace Lutheran is Jesus. Those who commemorate Passover teach the children what God has done. One of the great opportunities of anniversaries is to remember what God has accomplished over the years. Once the Lord freed His people in the Passover, a defining moment in salvation history. A 50th anniversary of a church is not on the same level but we are none-the-less celebrating God blessing us with a day that does define the ministry of God in this place. No matter how one slices it, we are teaching the next generation to remember what has been done by the Lord that helped make 50 years in our current location possible. Imagine 50 years after the Exodus, Israel was in the Promised Land remembering how they got there by commemorating what God had done a generation before.

A second reason that anniversaries are good is that by retelling our history we gain confidence for our future. Note the promise of verse 25. “When you enter the Land the Lord has promised...” This verse is given even before anyone has left Egypt. No one yet has tasted freedom. Yet, the Lord speaks in a tone that is certain that the Land promised will one day be occupied by Israel. Grace Lutheran thrives today because of the certain hope that we have in Jesus’ Word of a promised resurrection. Grace Lutheran’s main purpose is the Gospel as its center. Right now, we remain captive to our sin in a fallen world. For now we hear of our future in a 50 year old sanctuary. We hear of another place not built by human hands, a place that cannot fade, spoil, or be broken. And it’s ours through Jesus’ promise to all believers. We will be given a promised place in the Father’s House. When the Israelites looked back on their history they were looking at a future too. That future was Jesus, the fulfillment of the Passover.

Grace Lutheran has spent its years remaining focused on the Gospel of Jesus. 50 years in one location is not that long in the grand view of things but it’s more proof that the Lord is still at work. We only got this far in our history because the Lord has blessed us with His Word and Spirit. The Lord has blessed us even through seasons of blessings as well as trouble. We remember and celebrate that while everything changes the Lord remains the same. Jesus’ continued grace is also worthy of our attention as we consider the call process for a new pastor and a new music director next year. It is good to have confidence in the Lord and courage to believe that the Lord will continue to be with Grace and help us reach the next chapter of our congregation next year. God is still good, still faithful, and still provides because he still the great “I Am” and He still with us.

May the Lord then bless our anniversary. May our commemoration teach the next generation about the faithful who have gone before us and how the Lord has been so active in our history. May our commemoration also remind us that our future in Jesus remains just as fixed now as it was when we started generations ago. And may we remember as part of our future is the certainty that someday we will get to see those previous generations again in the resurrection. Finally, may our anniversary continue to remind us that the Lord will provide what we need in our call process. May the Lord make us wise and discerning in our call process. May the Lord make us diligent to serve Him as we move into the next chapter of our Congregation. “This is the Day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30