

*“Time Flies”*  
*Century Service: 2000 and Beyond*  
*September 27, 2009*

A possible worldwide catastrophe had been predicted for the close of 1999. Due to an error which had been built into computers which ran just about everything, at the stroke of midnight, it was feared that everything could simply shut down. The phenomenon even had a name: Y2K! People were advised to store up water and food supplies, caches of money, and emergency rations. When computers failed, chaos would be the first experience of the twenty-first century.

I was at home on the couch, running a fever and feeling badly enough with the flu that frankly, at the moment I did not really care if the world ended! But midnight came. Fireworks shot into the new year. The lights stayed on. The earth kept turning. People who had stored up food did not have to shop for months. Eventually I got better. The world moved into a new century too soon marked by real disasters that would tax our spirits and try our mettle. Also to come would be great joys that would cause our spirits to soar and surprises that would make us glad. Still so close to all that has happened since the beginning of this century, we remain in the process of making connections, discerning direction, discovering meaning. In relation to our own church's history, ten years amounts to 3.7 percent of 275. A moment in the march of history. The twinkling of an eye. Time flies.

This reality came very clear to me last Sunday. A rose on the Table celebrated the birth of Liam Blair Brymesser into this household of faith. His mother, April, was one of the teenagers who greeted me when I arrived in 1996! Soon we will baptize Liam, April and Justin's third child. Liam will join 53 other infants and children who have been baptized here in slightly more than a decade. Nine adults and eight young confirmands have also taken the plunge in those swiftly passing years. The parents of many of these children have been among the 235 members received into the congregation. At least fifteen couples married here in this same time frame are the nucleus of a lively group of young adults who participate in the life of our congregation. Time flies.

My intuition tells me that this present vitality was a high hope among those who, in the late 1980's, guided, led, and supported the campaign to build a second floor on the education wing and to make improvements to the physical plant which would enhance the life of this congregation. Their vision bridged the congregation into this new century and provided the setting for classes, dinners, meetings, rehearsals, Bible studies, coffee hours, receptions, and all those gatherings which feed and nurture people in faith, community, and service. Communication was fostered, relationships strengthened, faith nurtured. The church body was strengthened. The field was prepared for yielding good fruit.

Elders who served on our Sessions early in this new century shared a vision for a lively congregation, “worshipping, educating, equipping, and serving in Christ's name.” Recognizing deep roots, they worked prayerfully together to establish ways for fresh

branches to grow. By the leading of God's Spirit, some forward looking decisions were made. To enhance the pastoral ministry of the congregation, the Session contracted with Rev. Crea Clark to serve as parish associate. He made connections with visitors, called in homes and hospitals, and, with his own history of service to the church of Christ, Crea also provided your pastor with a listening ear and collegial support.

Elders serving on various Sessions honed a vision for Christian education. They believed Christian education is not for children only, but is a process of discipleship and life-long learning for adults, as well. Coupled with a desire to add a person to the church staff as part of a team to coordinate programs and lead the church with specific gifts, the position of Christian educator - program director was established. Late in 2000, an invitation was given to Deb Madden to fill that position. But Deb had to check out the church before she would make a decision.

She recounted for me that her first visit among us was for worship on the Sunday Katie Thomas was baptized. Deb remembered the emphasis that morning was on welcoming people into the community of faith in the name of Jesus. Katie was from China, her grandfather Jarl was from Holland, and all of us were adopted into Christ's household through the water of baptism. Deb confesses she herself felt very welcome to this church on that Sunday, which helped her to say YES to the invitation - now a call - to serve here.

Again in the life of this congregation, a visionary commitment was made by our Session at the time not just on behalf of people already part of this congregation. A commitment was also made on behalf of those people of all ages who were not even present yet. Openness to the future and to the movement of God's Spirit, and to extending welcome in Christ's name were all part of the decision which enabled the church to say YES when Deb said YES. Time flies! Almost ten years later, Katie is nearly lost in the crowd of children who gather for worship, sing anthems, break bread, witness other baptisms, and grow in faith in a variety of program and service opportunities.

About this same time, we experienced a very hot summer. We could not open enough windows to keep the sanctuary cool for worship, nor could we keep the icing on a wedding cake from melting at a reception in Fellowship Hall one early July. Perhaps with the flames of hell in mind, our Session finally approved the installation of air conditioning! Hallelujah! Remarkably, attendance at worship increased during summer months.

This was part of a series of improvements which, like raising the roof in the late 1980's, have made this particular pile of stones a favorable place for worship, mission, education, fellowship, and outreach. In no particular order, but all within relatively recent time (though it flies!): the gaslights were refurbished; the Gathering Room was redecorated; the choir room was remodeled and greatly improved; the pipe organ was refurbished and was married to an electronic organ; much interior painting was finished, including the sanctuary; the entire structure received a new roof as well as better insulation; the top of the tower was repaired and insulated; the lower level classroom area was redone when the

elevator was installed; the plaza and some sidewalks were improved; drainage received attention, as did the fire alarm system and fire suppression in the kitchen - to name a few things!

This work was accomplished with much support from church leaders as well as people in the congregation who gave gifts of shared skills, time, vision, and finances. Several members of the congregation made these changes possible because they were stewards of their finances by means of bequests. Looking toward the future, they graciously and generously made the church a beneficiary in their wills. Several grants from the Stuart Foundation were also received with gratitude. This past year, that same Foundation and gifts from the congregation made the rebuilding of the Meeting House springs Cemetery a reality and a gift for years to come.

Other building and renewal has occurred within this historic and spirited space which is even more important. Realizing the vision was much larger and the call far broader, the position of educator-program director became full time in 2004. About this time Deb also finished the continuing education to become a certified associate educator in the Presbyterian Church. This certification would be joined with her certification in spiritual development, recently awarded. Both accomplishments serve to strengthen not only Deb's leadership but also our congregation - from Presbyterian Women to Children's Church, from worship to fellowship. An enhanced children's library, the Book Club, FAST Friends, summer Toddler Time, and, of course, the "dummies" - which have been disciples, prophets and women of the Bible joining us for summer worship through the years - have been a few of the renewing elements in our common life of faith.

The Spirit has moved through members of our congregation who, in these quickly passing years, have co-ordinated mission and outreach with projects such as the resettlement of a Bosnian refugee family, the building of a Habit home, the Presbyterian pounding Nails program which brought together youth and adults to spruce up homes of people in need. Faithful volunteers continue to work with Project: SHARE, Maranatha, Samaritan Fellowship, and other community ministries. Generous giving supports the general mission of the church, special needs, and all that we are able to accomplish here every week.

As a glance at any of our pictorial directories will prove, these years have brought transitions, as well. People we have known and loved have moved away, some dropped out, and 97 have entered the Church Triumphant. Leadership in music has transitioned several times from Richard Tritt to Shirley King at the organ, with Nancy Dell and Arthur Thompson lending their skills. Ron Richcreek, Judy Murphy, and Clyde Barr (once again!) have directed a choir which, itself has remained strong while various singers have moved through its ranks. A children's choir has blossomed under the direction of Ann Bean and Betsy Bean who, herself, was about the age of some of the choir members not that many years ago. Time flies! Through it all, God has blessed us abundantly, strengthening our worship and enriching our spirits with music.

In the passing of time we have had our struggles, of course. These come with making choices, defining goals, pursuing vision. Challenges come with every age, as do great opportunities to serve the kingdom of God. The challenges and the call to Christ serve to underscore our awareness of our dependency on God, our need for continued prayer and discernment, our reliance upon one another within this Body of Christ, and the surprising nature of God's grace and mercy.

As slightly more than ten years has already taught us, time flies. As we seek to be faithful in our vocation as a congregation, we cannot afford to be complacent in our commitment. We have but one opportunity to be teachers of faith to the children presently granted to us who, in too short of a time, will become teens and then adults going out on their own. Now is the time to equip them with deep roots so they may bear good fruit.

Ten years ago an IBM Selectric typewriter crouched on our church secretary's desk. Since then we have upgraded a computer system twice! We e-mail, blog, twitter, and Facebook each other. Blackberries and cell phones add to avenues of communication. Time flies. We seek to use these tools to communicate the gospel of Christ and to connect with each other effectively in the community of faith. Yet we remain committed to providing the place and space where, in Christ's name, we provide personal welcome, face-to-face encounter, and warm human interaction because the gospel of Christ is intended to be "the Word made flesh." Here is the place where every generation finds welcome, where we continue to confirm a common, connected life; where the story of God's love is enacted; and from where Good News becomes enfleshed in mission beyond these hallowed walls.

Although time flies, as these ten or more years prove, "It helps now and again to step back and take a long views," prays Archbishop Oscar Romero. "The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work... This is what we are all about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already panted, knowing that they hold the future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities... We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that... This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest... We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the Master Builder and the worker. We are the workers, not the master builders; ministers not messiahs; we are prophets of a future not our own."

#### RESOURCES:

Nikiosha, Roger, lecture, Princeton Theological Seminary  
- with quotes from Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*  
Prayer of Archbishop Oscar Romero  
Conversation and reflection with Deb Madden

*Rev. Jon A. Black*

*First Presbyterian Church  
On the Square  
Carlisle PA  
275<sup>th</sup> Anniversary / “Century Service” Series*