

Pastor Jon's Our Savior's 150th Anniversary Sermon on Sunday, Nov 13, 2022

Wow, 150 years of ministry in Neenah, WI. Can I get an Amen? But I can assure you, we are not finished yet.

I think of the great cloud of witnesses, both past and present, who carted you to church, who welcomed you, who went on mission trips with you, who encouraged you in your walk... parents, grandparents, teachers, pastors, ministry associates, friends. We give thanks for that cloud of witnesses that is still cheering us on.

I think of all the church councils and staff of Our Savior's who were faced with times of plenty and times of want, who made decisions to keep the congregation moving forward in Christ's mission regardless of what was going on in the world like world wars, natural disasters, economic upturns and downturns, the suffrage and civil rights movement, countless elections, and a pandemic. The Holy Spirit continues to push the church to become more welcoming and loving of all, and to remove barriers that keep people from feeling whole and accepted as is. The Holy Spirit already knows where it wants the church to go, we just have to catch up.

When I think of church anniversaries, I think of milestones. I first saw a milestone while I was biking the Heritage Trail with friends, rails to trails, from Dubuque, IA, to Dyersville, IA. Where the Field of Dreams is. It was 28.2 miles one way. And we were not long distance bikers. It sounded like a good idea. Then on the way back, I couldn't wait to see the next milestone. They were these beautiful pointed stones on the side of the trail with numbers on them. Every once and a while, we would stop, take a break, reflect on the ride, and refuel our bodies. But really, milestones are meant to pass by on the way to the next one. Today, we are celebrating our 150th milestone, we will rejoice, eat, reminisce, and then hop on our bikes and keep going.

In the Augsburg confession Article 8, "What the church is" says, "The Christian Church is nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints... which also includes false Christians, hypocrites, and even open sinners. It is the community where the Gospel is taught purely

and the sacraments are administered rightly. In other words, the church made up of people... of flawed humans like you and me who gather together in Jesus name to hear the word and receive the sacraments. We are the church.

One of my professors, once referred to Holy Communion as Powerbars for the faith journey. I can wrap my head around that. You know when you are tired and weighed down by the world and come to church, communion is meant to lift you from sin and despair, and give you the energy to go in peace and serve the Lord.

Your gifts and talents are the “ministry fuel” that keeps the congregation going forward with Christ’s mission of love and healing. Without your financial support and willingness to share your time and talents, we would run out of fuel. But I believe we still got a lot left in the tank, thanks to your generosity and willingness to be changed by the Word.

Now about our lessons for today. Here we are celebrating our 150th and Jesus is predicting the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and all its beautiful stones. Not one stone will be left on another.

The disciples wanted to know when and where will these signs be? But Jesus teaches not to get preoccupied with the time and signs of the end. Jesus says, there will be false messiahs and false calculators of time and place. You will hear of wars and insurrections, earthquakes, famines, plagues. But the end will not follow immediately.

Jesus says, but do not be terrified, those things will take place. Even amid painful and prolonged suffering, our faith looks to heaven believes, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

So what do we do in the meantime? We don’t give up. It is easy to fall into despair. But all these things will give you an opportunity to testify. We are now in a time of witnessing. And Jesus will give you the words to say. We as the body of Christ in the world today are called to be faithful witnesses of Jesus love and healing under times of unusual stress and pain. Things will fall apart. There will be rubble. But the church is called to operate in the middle of it all. For

example, week we had Doug Bisbee from Samaritan Counseling come and talk to teenagers and their parents about the stress young people are under and depression and anxiety. He proclaimed the hope of our faith in the midst of the challenges going on in our world. It was the perfect image of the church today... meeting people where they are at.

Let us keep on keeping on, Jesus says in our Gospel, "By our endurance, we will gain our souls."

Amen!