

We Love to Tell the Story

“Between Memory and Expectation”

Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey

Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey returned to preach at Hyde Park for our 115th Anniversary on March 16, 2014. Based on Hebrews 11:1-12:2, he described the way the church lives between the memory of God’s work in the past and the expectation of what God will do in the future.

My family came here in 1951, a couple of months before my eleventh birthday. In those years we had Sunday school and worship attendance of somewhere between 350 and 400 persons. We were in one sanctuary for worship – this one – sort of. The windows are the same today as they were then. The pews were placed in a quarter-round setting, with the end of the building where the balcony is today containing two levels of Sunday school rooms and offices. I remember the offices well! My mother made me go to one to apologize to Dr. Laurie Ray for misbehaving in church the previous Sunday evening. I suppose that experience was part of my character-building growth in those years, though I didn’t think so at the time! But I will never forget Dr. Ray’s graciousness!

The interior of this building has been taken down to the ground twice – in 1954 and again in 2003. Each time the walls and windows remained. We worship this morning in the third rendition of the interior, though if you were to stand at the corner of Platt and Cedar, this building looks virtually the same as it did when the walls were first raised in 1907.

This is the only local congregation of which I have ever been a member. I was a member of this church until I was ordained, and my membership was placed in the annual conference. But early on my life was shaped by the character of this church.

For as long as I have known it, this has been a church that will not be led down a narrow-minded, self-focused, turned-inward path. It has been a church of broad mindedness, welcoming a diverse constituency, focused on the hurts and needs of the world beyond its doors, an outward-turned identity. It is in the DNA of this place. The other has been tried more than once, and it has always failed; because the character of this church has continuously grown out of the fullness of the gospel, not some miniscule substitute. That’s why I once described this church as “a place where love has been the norm rather than the exception..., and a place where I learned that faith can not only withstand, but even be strengthened by, thoughtful reflection.”

That’s the Memory! And now – to the Expectation

The writer to the Hebrews talked about a whole history full of faithful persons. When we remember and celebrate someone who has led us in the past, we need to be reminded that there were others who came after – in a succession of faithful persons, one after the other. There is always another chapter. Those who live by faith are future-oriented.

I saw the roof come off, the inner walls come down, the floor removed – until there was nothing inside these brick walls but Florida sand! Then the newly renovated sanctuary took shape. That was 1954. It happened again a decade ago. Some of you didn't see it either time so the only worship space you know is the one we are in this morning! At every instance where the *Present* this congregation has known became a *Memory*, there has always been a new *Expectation*!

Though no one knows just where it will lead, this congregation is looking ahead, as it has always done.

The writer concludes with these words: “*All these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.*” Think about it: the lives and works of those faithful ones will not be complete, final, finished, perfect apart from us. We complete the work of others. And, by extension, *our* lives, *our* work, will not be complete, final, finished, perfect apart from those who follow us. They are the ones who complete our work. At any moment in time, we live between Memory and Expectation. The Memory of who and what we have been is always, *ALWAYS*, completed, made perfect, in the Expectation of who and what we are called to be.