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One Century in the Service
of our Lord Jesus Christ

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Newz of His

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Guided by His Word,
Serving in His Love

A 100th Anniversary Devotion

(thoughts shared on the occasion of the Church's 100th Anniversary Banquet,
October 13th, at the Conestoga Country Club)

For tomorrow morning, I have asked Ken to read a number of greetings to the congregation from people who have been a part of this church over the last century. Some of you may know none of them. Some of you will know some of them. Some of you might know all of them. But the truth is, they each belong to all of you, and you each belong to all of them. That is the glorious nature of the true church. It exists outside of linear time as it is measured in years or even centuries. We are a part of something that transcends the boundaries of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

I'll prove it to you.

I sneaked one of the greetings we received out of the stack that I gave to Ken because I'm pretty sure that none of you would know this particular well-wisher from Adam. Benette Rhoades is from the Washington Avenue Christian Church in Amarillo, Texas. Now, according to *MapQuest*, that church is 1,578.44 miles from our church. But, when my mom died in 2000, Benette started following and rooting for my ministry, and by extension, for each of you. Anyway, here's what she wrote:

Congratulations on your 100th Anniversary in Lancaster, PA!
I hope you have a special reunion . . .

When we used to honor children who had birthdays in their Sunday morning opening exercises, we had a unison greeting:

*Many Happy Returns on the day of your birth,
May sunshine and gladness be given.
And may the dear Father prepare you on earth,
For a beautiful birthday in Heaven. "*

Yours should be an especially happy occasion. Best wishes from a sister church member. - Benette Rhoades

What caught my attention was that she referred to the identical birthday greeting that our *Senior Adult Class* still recites every time one of its members racks up another year. I just thought it was kind of cute that a little practice like a birthday rhyme evidences a link that churches and church people have that transcends time and space. But, that is just a tiny hint of a remarkable bond that unites every child of faith who has ever lived or who ever will. There is an awe-invoking little passage in *Hebrews 12* that describes that bond in imagery that is nothing short of breathtaking:

²²But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. - Hebrews 12:22, 23

In *Ephesians*, Paul describes believers as already seated in heavenly realms. To me, this passage fleshes out that passage. We cannot see with earthly eyes all the reality that is really there. For now, God requires that we walk by faith and not by sight. But, faith is the absolute certainty that what we don't see is still really, really there. We are already in the company of "thousands of angels in joyful assembly" and we are a part of "the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven." In this context "firstborn" means that we, together with all whose names are in the book of life, are an assembly of beloved, authoritative and highly-favored children of God. They include Moses, Abraham, David, Joseph, Paul, Elijah, Noah – all the pioneers of faith that are depicted in Hebrews as a cloud of witnesses, pulling for us in our faith journeys.

But, tonight, as we have watched images pass across the screen of people from our church, many of whom are long dead, I am reminded of how Jesus had to remind certain Pharisees that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." We are a part of a living nation that includes my Mom, your loved ones, those folks on the screen, the champions of the Great Reformation, the heroes of the Old Testament, the Apostles – even some of those Presbyterians from Dave's side of the family – as well as every saint of every age purchased back to God by the blood of Jesus.

What's on their minds as they gather around us in this mystical, invisible, but very real sense, I am sure that they appreciate our backwards glances along with the precious memories, the tender nostalgia and the loving affection that accompany those glances. But, according to the Scripture, this "great cloud of witnesses" exists to encourage us in our walk forward in faith. They do not want us to pine for yesterday. They want us to understand that though the present and the future may look different from the past, there will always be opportunities for the people of God to advance the Kingdom of God.

We honor them most when we honor their God, Who is our God and Who, in the final analysis, is the God of the living, period.



Karl's Korner