

Devotion Fourth Week of Easter, 2021

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

I recently received a request from the Presbytery for several congregational pictures and the charter date of our church. A composite of all the churches is being prepared for its website. So I began asking around for pictures and the charter date. Turns out the charter date is right there on the historical marker at the front of the church – December 26, 1825. Then I got really curious about the history of our church. Cindy found me some documents, and I have been fascinated reading about how this church was formed, and the Philadelphia community around it.

I went to Revelation to see what John had to say about the original Philadelphia church. John speaks a prophecy to the seven churches in Asia and also provides feedback about how these churches are doing. He is particularly complimentary of Philadelphia's faith and mission:

"I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. **I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.** I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and **they will learn that I have loved you.** Because **you have kept my word of patient endurance,** I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth."

Note that this was a small church, with little power, but it had prevailed and kept the faith. And God loved them for this faithfulness, which involved patient endurance. After reading the history of PPC, I think that this description serves our church well. PPC has provided members for a number of organizing churches, including Riverdale, Hapeville, and Morrow churches. It has built three church buildings and repaired the current one after suffering damage from a fire in 1975. It has had a camp ground for meetings in the 1800's, a manse, and a Scout Hut – all gone now. It has buried members in the Old Huie – Philadelphia Community Cemetery on Melrose Dr at Ash St, and it has buried members in its own cemetery.

It has continued to carry on, from a decline in the 1840's to 11 members, from great membership and financial losses during the Civil War and the Depression of the 1920's, to the camp-ground based growth in the 1850's and the increased membership in the 1950's and 1960's. We are a little rural church, now surrounded by the industrial area of a large metropolitan area. Yet we keep on keeping on. We continue to have services, even during a pandemic, we continue to support 20 mission programs, and we continue to share the gospel with those around us.

I hope that later this year we can have Homecoming. It had to be cancelled last year, but this event every 5 years has been a vital part of PPC's history, so I am praying for pandemic relief and vaccinated members so we can finally eat a meal together. And in less than 4 years, we will be celebrating our Bicentennial.

We're a little church, but we are mighty. I quote the cover of the 2000 Homecoming Booklet:

"To all who mourn and need comfort, to all who are tired and need rest, to all who are friendless and want friendship, to all who are lonely and want companionship, to all who sin and need a Savior, and to whosoever enters, this church opens wide its doors in the name of Christ our Lord, and says Welcome."

Amen. It is an honor to have been with you for 8 weeks now. In the coming week, may you receive comfort, rest, friendship, companionship, and the love of your Savior. And if you can join us for worship on Sunday morning, I promise you that you will be welcomed.

Jeanne