

75 Years And We Aren't Finished Yet

What a wonderful weekend. It has been such a joy to come together like this, to visit and reminisce about the good old days, to reflect back upon the heritage that we have as members of this great church.

You know that all of our former pastors have gone on to their reward. In the 75 years of this church we have had 14 pastors. I am honored to be a part of a list like this.

1933 - Rev. F.A. Hill (Red Fork Group)

1934 - Rev. Earl Davis (Carbondale Group)

1934 - Rev. B. H Caudle (Carbondale Assembly of God)

1935 - Rev. Lynch

1936 - Rev. H. T. Owens

1939 - Rev. F. C. Cornell

1943 - Rev. George Newby

1946 - Rev. J. C. Minor

1947 - Rev. Eric Johnson

1948 - Rev. R. M Crenshaw

1950 - Rev. R. G. Helvey

1956 - Rev. H. D. Pieratt

1975 - Rev. J. L. McQueen

1985 - Rev. Phil Taylor

There may be family members of some of the former pastors present today. If you are related to one of the pastors of Carbondale on this list, would you please stand so we can recognize you. (Recognize Sis. Cornell and Betty Wing, Sis. Helvey, Sis. McQueen and Paula).

We have a number of the former associate pastors or their family members that are with us today. If you have served as an associate of some kind here at Carbondale would you and your family stand.

One of the healthy things about Carbondale is that it has continued over the 75 years to send people out into full time ministry. If you are now or have been in the past involved in full time ministry, would you stand so we can recognize you as well.

One more group I want to recognize and that is some of that original group. If you were here when the church started 75 years ago, would you stand. And if you have been attending more than 70 years, more than 60 years, more than 50 years, please stand.

75 years. Congratulations on a job well done. But the job isn't finished yet, is it?

I've been thinking about this day for months now and what I could say to the church. I thought about a message I preached on Memorial Day of 2008. I talked about the spiritual DNA of this church, the DNA that had been imparted to us by the former pastors of this church. I singled out some pastors, the ones I either knew or I knew their spouse and talked about the influence they had upon this church. We talked then about

Our Spiritual DNA

- 1. A pioneer spirit. (Rev. H.T. Owens)**
- 2. Sound doctrine and Pentecostal zeal (Rev. F.C. Cornell)**
- 3. Missions (Rev. Eric Johnson)**
- 4. Christian Education (Rev. R.G. Helvey)**
- 5. Evangelism and Outreach (Rev. H.D. Pieratt)**
- 6. Compassionate care and encouragement of the hurting (Rev. J.L. McQueen)**

We are what we are because of men like these and the other pastors and their families that taught us and encouraged us. They shaped this church and our future. But will those things, that spiritual DNA, will that carry us through the problems and issues we face today? Are those things outdated? I mean look at the problems we are facing today – the economy in shambles, government out of control, big brother seems to be growing and becoming more intrusive in our lives, sin is rampant, no regard for God or his word, violence and war is everywhere in our culture and in our world. Can a church make a difference? Can our faith make a difference in the world? Is there a need for the message we have to share or are the problems just too great today?

Look back 75 years with me to that group of believers who were meeting as the Pentecostal Assembly at Red Fork and the little group of believers that had been challenged by their pastor at the Carbondale Community Church to find a deeper experience with God through the baptism in the Holy Spirit. They came together

believing that there was a need for a church like theirs in this community in 1933-1934. But you know there were a lot of challenges to face, a lot of obstacles against them. You think we are facing some tough issues today. Think about this:

Seventy five years ago – 1934. It was what one source called the turning point in the great depression. Unemployment had decreased – get this – it had decreased to only 22%. 22% unemployment in 1934! Here in Oklahoma and Texas we were in the middle of a terrible drought that resulted in the infamous era of the dust bowl. 35 million acres of farmland had been destroyed with an additional 225 million acres in danger. The summer of 1934 temperatures had reached 117 in Oklahoma, the hottest summer on record. The country was being terrorized by folks like John Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde, Pretty Boy Floyd, Baby Face Nelson (incidentally they were all gunned down in 1934). Around the world things were in crisis. Hitler was the chancellor of Germany, Stalin had begun murdering thousands in Russia, and in a few years the world would be plunged into the war to end all wars.

Not exactly the best time to start a church or to think about a building program. Or was it? The church began renting a space over the drugstore in Carbondale and two years later, in 1936, the pastor, Bro. Owens and the church would borrow \$1400 to purchase the land and build a building across the street, at the corner of West 48th and South 31st West Ave. Our first permanent home. The church members pledged \$52.50 per month to repay that loan. Enough men were still out of work so they spent time working on the church building and got that rock church built. Over the years additions were made and renovations completed and today it is still standing on that corner, a strong African-American congregation meets there now, still preaching the gospel from that site.

1934, the depression and dust bowl days, everyone in Oklahoma is struggling, and our elders decide to build a church, by faith. It may have been the wrong time by some standards. It may have been a stormy time to build a church with war clouds already gathering, but when you walk by faith and live by faith and act in faith, well – faith doesn't always lead you to do what looks reasonable or sensible. Faith acts in spite of the storms. Faith acts in the storms.

You know it. Over the past 75 years this church has weathered the storms, both

figuratively and literally. The 1930's those preachers and deacons put their names on the bank note. They did it again through the years. They put their houses up as collateral to get the money to build a church. They weathered the storms and paid off the note and built the church. They did the same to purchase this ten acres here and to build a new facility here in 1967.

The storms of war came and blew across this world. We watched as our young men went off to war, in World War II. There is a picture back there in the Heritage Room (we've decided to rename the fellowship hall to the Heritage Room) of a group of young ladies but there is only one man in the group. Someone said it was because all the young men were in the military during WWII. We watched them go off and return again, back to their families and back to Carbondale to work and to serve and to give. We watched them go off again, to Korea, and then Viet Nam, and then to the gulf and Iraq and Afghanistan. And through it all the Carbondale church family has been there praying, interceding for those young men and women and time and again God has brought them safely home to us.

There have been other storms that have come. I remember Gwen Johnson telling about the polio epidemic as it swept across the nation. They had warned people not to gather in crowds, suggesting that churches not gather together, but Carbondale met to pray, believing God to deliver them from a plague that had come upon our nation. It's what we learned to do, it's what we knew to do. Over 75 years, when crisis would arise, Carbondale met to pray, to seek God, to believe together that God would show himself strong in our behalf, and over and over, again and again, he did just that.

Time doesn't permit us to tell of the testimonies, but ask some of the folks who have been here for awhile. Ask Bill McQuary about God providing for his family when his dad, John McQuary was so sick, at Mayo clinic. Ask the Scott family to tell you about God healing Orville. Ask someone about the Sunday morning that Erville Doke collapsed and we couldn't get a pulse, but people began to pray and by the time the ambulance came, she walked out of here. Ask some of the white haired folks about the storms that have blown through here and they can tell you that for 75 years we've prayed and called on the Lord and he has calmed the storm or brought us through victoriously time and time again.

This church was born out of the great depression. Economic hard times didn't stop us then and they can't stop us now. Over the past 75 years we've seen the economy go up and we've seen it go down, but look at the giving of this church. It has never been determined by the national economy. It's always been determined by the need and by our faith. The financial records are out there somewhere on one of the tables. Take a look at God's faithfulness in blessing this church.

The economy hasn't stopped us. War hasn't stopped us. Polio and plagues haven't stopped us. The tornado that blew the building away in 1999 didn't stop us. We watched God do a miracle. We were out of this building for 20 months. We had \$2.9 million in insurance money paid to us with a couple of hundred thousand in the bank. This church prayed and gave and worked and sacrificed. We spent \$4.8 million dollars and moved back into this building debt free, with more people in attendance and more money in the bank. Physical storms haven't stopped us.

We've said good bye to a lot of wonderful saints of God over the years. We've said goodbye to faithful pastors and leaders over these years as well. It's a little scary to me to realize I'm the only surviving pastor of this church and this spring I will have been the pastor for 25 years, almost 1/3 of the lifetime of this church. A lot of us have said goodbye to family members and friends. The pillars of this church have gone on and left us, but their passing didn't stop us or defeat us. We are still marching on.

75 years and so many changes in our world, in our culture. Can the church make it? Will we withstand all the attacks of the enemy, can we survive all the changes? Just two weeks ago 30 of us stood in Israel at the site where many believe Jesus asked his disciples the question, "Whom do men say that I am." Matthew's gospel records it in chapter 16. It says, "**When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'** 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my

church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” Matthew 16:13-18

This region the bible calls Caesarea Philippi is now called Banias. The Banias is one of the streams that flows into the Jordan River and on into the Sea of Galilee. The Greeks referred to it as Paneas after their god, Pan and the Arabs corrupted the pronunciation to the current name, Banias. There is a huge cave or cavern near the source of the springs. We visited this spot where pagan rituals were held and where the god Pan was worshipped. It was at this place, that some referred to as the gates of hell because of the sinful practices that occurred there, Jesus asked his disciples, “who do you say I am.” At this site, in the very face of pagan ritual and worship, Jesus said, “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it or prevent it.” I will build my church here, where Satan has his throne and influence. I will build my church here, where poverty and pain try to ruin and destroy. I will build my church here, where darkness is so prevalent, where answers are hard to find.

For 2000 years Jesus has been building his church and for 75 years he has allowed us to build on this little piece, on this little section of his church. And what he said to his disciples, standing there on the grounds of a vile site of pagan worship, he says to us today. “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it. Not in the past 2000 years. Not in the past 75 years. And not today.” He is building his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Not on our watch. Not as long as there are folks like you who will continue to pray and to call on God, who will continue to give and to go, to obey his commands, who will continue to love God and love their neighbor.

75 years and we aren't finished yet. 75 years and God isn't finished with us yet. 75 years and we are still finding ways to preach and teach and make disciples. 75 years and we aren't about to quit. The gates of hell are still there. The lost and broken are still all around us. The need is as great or greater than it was 75 years ago. That little group that met in prayer, that met in faith and full of the power of the Holy Ghost, that said let's merge together, let's start a church that will preach the full gospel message, that will proclaim the power of a risen Savior to this community and to this world, - that little group couldn't have imagined what the world would be like today, nor could they have imagined what this church would be like today, what we would accomplish.

Let's not let them down. They birthed something that we must not allow to die.

They saw a church that would march against the gates of hell and refuse to be defeated. I believe we are still part of that kind of church. 75 years and more to come, renewed and refreshed and invigorated and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

75 years and we aren't finished yet. In fact, if Jesus tarries, we are just getting started. I don't know what lies ahead, neither did that group over the drugstore, 75 years ago, but they knew who was in control. They knew who they were serving and that nothing was impossible for the God they served. Let's take that same knowledge and that same faith, that same spiritual DNA, and let's make a similar commitment to work until Jesus comes, to allow him to build his church through us and to make sure that not even the gates of hell will prevail against us, so help us God.