

Church Anniversary celebrates the past, present and future of the Church

One of my congregations, Zion Lutheran Church in Emblem, will soon celebrate her 120th Anniversary. Now, the history of Zion is an interesting one; well, I suppose all congregations are unique each in their own ways. But Zion is particularly interesting in this, that the congregation was not founded by the community, rather, the community was founded by the congregation. The first Pastor arrived on the Emblem Bench along with the congregation, recruited from Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota to settle and cultivate the land. This is how the Emblem community came into being.

When we think of the history of Zion, though, naturally our first thoughts will be of our own memories, and the people we remember.

Most anniversaries evoke memories of happy days, and happier than these. Many of the people we remember are no longer with us, and we miss them. And conditions change. Usually, particularly as we get older, we tend to think of days gone by as the time when we could do things no longer possible. And most often, time will cast a merciful veil of obliviousness over many of our less pleasant memories.

Conditions at Zion have changed, also, over the years. Zion is no longer the congregation she once was; she is much smaller now, and a much less dominant factor in the life of the community - as is common, I guess, for congregations of considerable age.

The Church of Christ is never capable, however, of celebrating only the happy memories of that which was and is no more - not even when she celebrates the past, such as at an anniversary, or at a funeral; in so far as she is the Church of Christ, she will always and at all times be celebrating that which is her past and her present and her future: the love of God in Christ.

This love is from eternity to eternity. It manifested itself in time, in that the Son of God came to save sinners by suffering Himself His own judgement against sin, in the stead and on behalf of all sinners. And His love still manifests itself in the life of the sinners He calls to Himself with His Word of His love and what His love has done, so that they hear and believe His promise of eternal life and come to be His Church.

God lives in His Church and gives Himself to His Christians, and His salvation, and His eternal life, with His living Word. This is the innermost reality of the life of the Church, and always will be; whether Zion will exist for another 120 years, or until the Lord comes in glory to restore all things - whenever that may be.