

TITLE: "A Quarter Century Together"

TEXT: I Peter 2:1-10 (NT p. 233)

Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.

²Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴Come to [Jesus], a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and ⁵like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

⁷To you then who believe, [Jesus] is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," ⁸and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of [Jesus] who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This morning we are celebrating the fact that we have been together, as congregation and pastor, for 25 years; a quarter century. ...What was it like here in our church 25 years ago? Here are some excerpts from the first newsletter I wrote, dated June 1986.

I wrote this out long hand and Carol typed it on stencils using our standard portable typewriter because the print was larger, and clearer, than the massive electric Smith Corona typewriter at church. The office, by the way, was what is now the coat room. Light was supplied by a bare socket sticking out of the ceiling. The newsletter was run off on an electric A. B. Dick stencil machine that someone had just donated to replace the old one that was cranked by hand.

The letter goes: "We are happy that the Lord has called us to Dryden. It is a beautiful area in which to live. More important than the lovely surroundings, however, has been the kindness expressed by so many in the church. Some wrote and telephoned us before we arrived, and a group even drove all the way to Simsbury, Connecticut to attend my ordination!

“Our arrival “officially” began with the installation service and reception, which were held on May 4th. What a wonderful time of fellowship that was. Thank you to all who contributed to making that such a special occasion for us.”

“Thank you, too, to everyone who helped to fix up the manse. Carol and I have lived in apartments since we were married, almost ten years ago, and it was a joy to move into our first house. We appreciate all the effort that went into making it so comfortable and beautiful.” [This, by the way involved allowing us to pick the paint color for each room. When it was mentioned that there were cat allergies in our family, some of the ladies got down on their knees and cleaned the cracks between the floorboards with toothbrushes because the interim pastor who had lived there had cats.]

[The manse, for those who have joined us since, was the current church office. The parking lot was a grassy back yard with a flowering cherry tree. There was no connecting hallway and a road actually ran between the church and manse and exited to the east of the Methodist church.]

The newsletter continues: “Since we arrived, our six-year-old twins, Catherine and John, have begun attending Kindergarten at Dryden Elementary School. Both enjoy their teachers, and although they don’t often admit it, both are learning a lot and having fun.”

What else was going on in the church in June of 1986? At the time, oil, electricity, LP gas, natural gas and wood were used to heat the church and manse and a heating committee was charged by session to “recommend a means of improving and reducing the cost of heating the church and manse.”

The Women’s Association was planning to sell brownies at the Dryden Dairy Day and they asked each woman in the church to make a pan of brownies.

We were supporting the Lima Project, which provided hot breakfasts to 200 children and lunch to 800 people every day in Lima, Peru.

Plans for “Children’s Day” were being made and they included a request for baby and childhood pictures of current adult members for the “Name that Person” contest.

The annual Supper for seniors graduating high school was in the works, plans were being made for the summer VBS and I was leading a Bible Study at Willowbrook.

We were also supporting Gayle Roberts who was from our church and was attending Princeton Theological Seminary.

There was also a note that John and Gladys Tompkins were moving to California so they could be closer to their children who lived in the Los Angeles area. John was the Small Fruit Specialist at Cornell and before he left John gave me a tour of his extensive U-Pick gardens in the back yard of his home on Lake Street. ...Seven years later, we bought their home after the manse was converted to office space.

This is what our church family was doing 25 years ago. A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then. I would now like to ask any who wish to share a remembrance from the past, present or somewhere in-between....

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When I was about 10-years-old, I was at a religious retreat in New Hampshire with my mother and sisters. One of leaders was Sister Estelle Carver. Although Sister Estelle had a kind face and sweet smile, she was a very strict, straight-laced lady, who spent a good deal of her life in prayer. One day as I was running across the grounds (I did a lot of running in those days) she stopped me, held my shoulders, looked into my face and said, "David Robinson, someday you are going to be a minister for the Lord."

When I was seventeen, I quit high school. I was working in construction and was the lead singer in very lousy, and very loud, rock band. I was also the president of our youth group at church. One time we had a guest pastor who spoke to our youth group. I had a lot of questions for him and afterward he wanted to shake my hand. He wouldn't let go and he pulled me toward him. It was an uncomfortable experience because I didn't know what was going on, but then he said, "David, that is pull to the ministry." ...Weird, but a while later I accepted Jesus as my Savior and the next year returned to high school with the intent of going into the ministry.

After graduation, I had such massive educational debts that I went to work in business in order to pay them off. I also began attending a Presbyterian Church in Simsbury, Connecticut. It was there that I met Carol. Later we were married and still later we had twin babies. I was working as a purchasing manager when my loans were paid off and I felt the call to the ministry.

Some may not realize this, but my ministry has been a joint venture. I would not have even gone to seminary if Carol had been reluctant to do so. She had the faith to sell almost everything we owned and take our babies off to seminary, which was far away from our families and friends. So, for the love, support and dedication you have given over these years of seminary and ministry, thank you, Carol.

After four years of graduate studies, we were looking for a church. We were called to churches in Ohio, Albany and Rhode Island, but the Lord said that each one was not the right one. That was a discouraging time. Then I met the pulpit nominating committee from this church and later you called us here and there I was, 25 years ago, writing this newsletter.

The newsletter goes on: "We are very touched by the love, care and concern that so many have expressed to us since our arrival. We feel very welcomed and appreciated." I can still recall the words of my Presbyterian Polity professor: "Plan to stay in your first church two years, three at the most. You will make so many mistakes that it will be time to leave and start over." Well, I did make mistakes, I'm still making them, but you have put up with me and forgiven me. Thank you.

The letter ends with this sentence: "All of us look forward to serving the Lord and growing together with you in your commitment to Jesus Christ, our church family and those in need beyond our church." That was my dream back then, and you made that dream come true.

We ARE a church family and we are committed to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We ARE a church family and we ARE committed to one another.

We ARE a church family and we are committed to helping those in need.

THANK YOU for making this dream come true.

I am a minister, but I am not a prophet, so I do not know what the future will bring. But I DO know this: Someday we will ALL will be together in heaven, and then we'll be together forever and ever and ever.

Amen.