

25 years ago this month the core group of members of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Ann Arbor meet about 2 miles east of here in a rented office building on Jackson Road to hold the very first worship service for Peace Lutheran Church. A lot of things have changed in that 25 years.

- We've gone from very few people having any kind of cell phone to the vast majority of Americans having a smart phone.
- The internet has gone from limited dialup access to Wi-Fi almost everywhere.
- The internet has changed everything from how we shop to how we get our information
- Social Media was unheard of 25 years ago. Now it is a dominate force in our culture
- The terrorist attacks of 9-11 changed our nation
- We elected our 1<sup>st</sup> Black President and our 1<sup>st</sup> Reality TV President
- 8 of the 9 justices on the Supreme Court are new.

There have been a lot of changes for Peace as well.

- Pastor Tom Schoech, the Associate Pastor of St. Paul, lead Peace for the 1<sup>st</sup> year.
- Pastor Don Mossman, Concordia College Professor, lead Peace the 2<sup>nd</sup> year.
- My family and I moved here in October 2015 to serve at Peace. I remember when we moved here thinking to myself, who am I to think that I can help grow a new church. The reality is I didn't and couldn't do it. But God could use me as one of many to grow the family of Peace.
- Peace was trying to buy 8 acres of land in 2015 against great opposition. We didn't get that land that would have been too small to do the things we are doing today.
- Ed Zill, a member of St. Paul and the realtor who managed our rental facilities, found our current location after that, 47.5 acres of land stretching back to I-94
- Instead of opposition, we were greeted by the neighbors and the property owners. After jumping through some hoops with the township, the land was purchased for us by the Michigan District Church Extension Fund. Instead of paying \$200,000 for the Jackson Road frontage, they sold the 14.5 acres we now have at the prorated price of \$89,000.
- The first building was as much of a DIY project as possible. Bill Koch's brother was hired to manage the site preparation and close the building to the weather. Bill Koch took over managing the building project from that point forward, using as much volunteer labor as possible
- Like all DIY projects, the building cost us more than we expected. Since our loan was from the Michigan District Church Extension Fund, they agreed to sell off the rest of the land and use the profit to pay of the extra money we had to borrow for the building. They forgive the \$100,000 plus extra we borrowed. The way I see it, God worked things out that we got the land at no cost.
- After Tyler Steffey, a member of Peace and student athlete at Dexter High School was killed in an accident, the community came together to raise funds to build the ballfield in

memory of Tyler. The fields have allowed us to connect with our community and touch the lives of many young people and their families in very positive ways.

- When we were considering the addition of the gym, classrooms and youth room, Dexter Coop Preschool was looking for a new home. God led them to Peace. Not only do they pay rent and gave us \$15,000 for the new addition, they also put in the new playground and bring all of these young families to Peace.
- A year after the new addition was opened, the recreational therapist at the U of M Mott Children's Hospital were looking to start a wheelchair basketball program. God led them to Peace and our adaptive sports ministry was launched.

These changes don't even begin to tell the story of all the people God has brought to Peace to help us grow our ministry, the doors He has opened to serve the people around us, the people who have stepped up to serve in so many different ways.

We should be very humbled by all of the good things God has done for this family of faith we call Peace and very thankful for all of His blessings. It would be a mistake today to look back and think about all of the things that we have done or to say look at us. We don't want to play "King of the Mountain." That's the game you may have played when you were a kid. Everyone climbs a pile of dirt and fights to stay on top. The person on top is king. Peace is certainly not the "King of the Mountain" when it comes to churches. What do we have that God didn't give us? What have we done that God didn't do first? The answer to both is nothing.

There is an old joke about an arrogant man who told God, "I can do what you can do! I can create a person out of dust! I understand the systems of life and science!" God accepted the offer and said, "Ok. Let's see what you can do." The man reached down and took a handful of dirt. But before he could do anything else God said, "I though you said you could do what I did." "I can" the man replied. God said, "Then get your own dirt."

Our key verse for today tells us, "*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*" (1 Peter 5:5) God opposes the proud because the proud resist him. Pride keeps people from confessing sins, repenting and asking for forgiveness. Pride prevents reconciliation with God and with other people. The Apostle Paul warns us, "*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.*" (Romans 12:3) Pride says "Look at me!" Humble faith says "Look at God!"

King Nebuchadnezzar learned the lesson about pride the hard way. Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon when they conquered Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and brought the leading citizens of Jerusalem to Babylon. He was the king of the most powerful nation in the world. Even though God showed Nebuchadnezzar his power and authority by sparing Daniel from the lion's den and three faithful men from a fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar didn't catch on. So God gave the king a

dream warning him that if he did not humble himself, he would end up like a wild animal living off the land. God gave the king a year to change, but he didn't.

One year after the dream Nebuchadnezzar stood on the roof of his palace and said, *"Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"* (Daniel 4:30) Immediately a voice from heaven said, *"This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox."* (Daniel 4:31-32) For seven years the king lived like a wild animal. At the end of the seven years God restored the king's sanity and power. Nebuchadnezzar said, *"Those who walk in pride he is able to humble"* (Daniel 4:37) The king learned that the Proverb is true that warns that pride comes before the fall.

Jesus set the example of humility for us to follow. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:5-11)

We don't know what changes the next 25 years will bring. We don't even know if there will be another 25 years. So we can't make great claims about what God is going to do at Peace or through Peace in the future. Christianity is facing some big challenges in our nation today. We at Peace have our challenges. But we can be confident of this promise that the Apostle Paul gave to the Christians in Philippi. *"I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns."* (Philippians 1:6 NLT)

We have hope for today and for the future as God leads us on the path of humble faith that we will encounter God's gifts of incredible love and grace. Amen.