

### **Back to the Future**

For those of you on facebook, I wonder how many “first day of school” posts you’ve seen? Proud parents and grandparents happily posting their kiddos and grand-kiddos with backpacks securely tossed over the shoulder and lunches in hand, on the front porch or just before boarding the big, yellow bus. Often, the current photos are side-by-side with photos of years gone by... a picture of the students’ first day of kindergarten beside one of the current student on the first day of their senior year of high school. Awww... look at ‘em, all grown up! I’ve also seen several posts from some of my favorite teachers! Some who are heading into their last year before retirement and are reflecting on their 38 years of teaching. Some who are right in the middle of their career and are excited about some new things they’re trying in their classroom. Some who are early on in their adventure and are being shaped and formed by their own teachers, their own expectations and enthusiasm. Whatever facebook scenarios you have seen, chances are, they’ve been partly about people looking both into the past as well as anticipating the future.

Here at Lorraine Avenue, since today is both Education Sunday as well as our Council/Congregational Retreat day, I’d like to do a bit of that too – looking into our past, in order to help us look ahead and eagerly anticipate our future.

I have four visual reminders this morning of ways that this congregation has been the branch that has been pruned by the vinegrower while always abiding in the vine.

First, the brick. This represents the bricks out of which the first meeting house was built. The story is told that in the early ‘30s, the resourceful folks who built this church used leftover bricks from the city that had been removed from the streets – back in the day when the streets were made of brick! So, naturally, they had tar on them. Church members would gather with their families in the evening, after work. The men would scrape and clean the tar off the bricks, the women would cook for everyone and the children would run around and play but also stack the clean bricks neatly so that they were ready to be used for the new building.

Although there had been many roadblocks and complications in the establishment of the Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church, there were seventeen charter members and eight single women who joined as associate members on October 9, 1932.

The congregation has abided faithfully in the vine with its worship practices ever since; these are represented by the two, tall candle-sticks. They are also from a time past, but not as long ago as the brick! These are wax-less, dripleless candles, often used in the candelabra at weddings. Lorraine Avenue has, in its history, an interesting combination of styles of worship. Our appreciation for more “high church” is clear as our Chancel Choir processes in in their robes, and the ethos of our worship leans heavily toward the intellectual. On the other hand, about a fourth of our worship time is spent sharing openly with one another the joys and concerns of our everyday lives. THAT’S not very “high” church! Music, of course, is a very important part of our worship together. While we tend to have a soft spot for the classics, we’re fairly eclectic and can

appreciate all kinds of styles – as long as it’s authentic, done well, and offered in the spirit of worship and praise to God.

Along with being faithful in our worship, our congregation has been attentive to fellowship and relationship-building. This is evidenced by relics like these (hold up two, small silver serving trays). These two small, silver trays were apparently used at some significant life celebration – a wedding, an anniversary or something. Sylvia Schmidt and Linda Doll cleaned and sorted in the hospitality room this week and the collection of artifacts that they found is on a table on the south wall of the Fellowship Hall – ready to be claimed, recycled or tossed! Feel free to see what kinds of treasures you can find down there!

The thing that makes these items particularly special and meaningful is the array of paper napkins in which this stuff is packed, reminding us of the celebrations for which they were used... (read some of the names and dates on the napkins...). These occasions and many others just like them, are significant times of fellowship, sharing our moments and our days together, making covenants with God and with one another.

Finally, if you noticed this missing from the north wall as you came in this morning, it’s because I took it down to use it as my final visual. This large photo display shows all the pastoral leaders of this congregation – before Tom and me. These are the folks who’ve given leadership to the Lorraine Avenue Mennonite congregation for the last nearly 100 years! Beginning with Arnold Funk and moving through Donald Steelberg – who served Lorraine Avenue two different times, first for three years in the sixties and then he returned for another fifteen years in the eighties and nineties! Each of these people – men and women – brought faithful, gifted, abiding-in-the-vine leadership and encouraged the congregation in their discipleship journey.

These four items are just that – four, representative items. The list of ways that the Lorraine Avenue congregation and God have been faithful to one another – the ways that Lorraine Avenue has been the branch, abiding in the vine – is long and varied.

Of course, there’s also a list of times when the branch has been pruned... times when we needed to be reminded that it’s not one’s family name or pedigree that qualifies a person for belonging. Times when we have to remember that it’s not our beautiful music that we worship. Times when we need to stay open to necessary changes, in spite of our love of tradition. Sometimes we have to be reminded that our faith has nothing to do with the food we eat but it has a lot to do with the kinds of questions we ask. Sometimes we need a little nudge beyond our comfort zone to help us follow Jesus more closely as he breaks through all kinds of barriers. God’s Spirit will continue to gently and effectively prune the branch that is the Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church. That same Spirit will continue to guide us as we faithfully abide in the vine. Throughout our lives, individually and corporately, God is faithful. Amen.

I look forward to having a discussion with all of you about ways you can identify God’s steadfast faithfulness in the past here at Lorraine Avenue, as well as talking about some ways we can move forward together as faithful followers of Jesus.