THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BLESS US!

1. A promise made
2. A promise fulfilled

When we think of today’s most innovative companies, we often list those that are less than a decade old – the ones based in Silicon Valley and have recently gone public. Arguably more impressive, however, are the companies that have been around for not just 10 years, but 10-plus decades. That is, before the internet, TV, air travel, the first World War, even older than our Minnesota District.

These companies have not just scraped by. They have reinvented themselves multiple times, acquired and sold entire business divisions and adapted to stay current. One company that is 125 years old is General Electric. It was founded in 1892, same year as Trinity, through a merger of Edison General Electric Company & Thomson-Houston Electric Company. They were not just involved in electricity. Over the years, they expanded to include RCA, NBC & other technology. They had to develop new technology in order to survive and build its customer base.

What about Trinity Lutheran Church? Trinity is celebrating 125 years. Like GE, it is still here. Like GE, Trinity has a product the world wants and needs. A big difference is that, as GE had to change and reinvent itself over the years to adapt to its customers, Trinity Lutheran Church has not. Sure, there have been some outward changes - a different building and its expansion; we do not worship in German any more; we have changed hymnals a couple of times as well as used different Bible translations. But one thing that has not change at Trinity Lutheran Church is God’s Word - the gospel of Jesus Christ.

125 years ago, some German immigrants went to the Lord in prayer, asking to start a church. The Lord said Yes. When they wanted a permanent building of their own for worship, again the Lord said Yes. When the original church burned down, they asked to Lord to help rebuilt. Once again the Lord said Yes. We gather in this house of worship to honor the name of the Lord and receive his blessings through Word and Sacrament and the Lord is still saying Yes.

You and I are living proof that God’s Word does not return to him empty but accomplishes the purpose for which he sent it. As he told the people of Israel 3,500 years ago, so it is today:

THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BLESS US!

In this chapter of Exodus we find the children of Israel camped near the foot of Mt Sinai. Under Moses’ leadership, God had led them by the hand, like a father leads his children, into the wilderness to separate them from their past and to prepare them for their future. There he taught them that life only worked one way – his way. Apart from him they could do nothing. It was a lesson they had to learn the hard way.

If you remember, while God was giving Moses the blueprint for his covenant with them, the people got restless and decided it was time to come up with some worship ideas of their own. Without bothering to consult the Lord, they made a golden calf and worshiped it saying, These are your gods that brought you up out Egypt. It was an exciting worship service. Everyone was involved. The problem was, God was not there. Instead of receiving a blessing, they put themselves squarely under his judgment for their blasphemy.

They had forgotten the promise they had heard from the Lord just a short time before this: Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. This is a interesting Bible passage. It tells us that true worship of God cannot spring from our natural, spiritually dead sinful hearts. True worship must be created in us. God must come to us and put his name on us, cause us to believe in him, cause us to confess him, cause us to worship him. There is only one place where he does that: in his written Word. God’s Name IS his Word. Apart from that Word, it is impossible to know God or be saved from his judgment against our sin.
God reveals himself only in his Word. That Word was the only tool the young congregation had when God gathered them together as his family at Mt. Sinai. But it was the only tool they needed. Through his Word, God promised to bless them with a land and nation of their own, protection from their enemies and guidance through all the troubles and temptations of life. Above all, he promised to deliver them from death and hell through the coming Savior.

From the beginning, the men, women, and children whom God caused to honor his name and who later formed Trinity Lutheran Church had just that one tool, too. Through his Word God had put his name upon us and promised that glorious blessings would attend his name, the greatest of which was his promise of free and full forgiveness of sins and eternal life through our Savior. For 125 years this congregation has held God to his promise and God has held you close to him through his Word. For 125 years the Holy Spirit has prompted you to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, to call pastors to proclaim God’s Word, to make sure that your sons and daughters were baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You have come to the Lord’s Supper in remembrance of Jesus and to receive his body and blood for the assurance of his forgiveness. You have supported the mission work of our Synod so that the gospel goes out to others. God has caused you to honor his name in worship and for spiritual growth in Bible Class and Sunday School. You have no doubt that There is no other name under heaven given among men but Jesus’ name by which we must be saved, and that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Look around this morning. Listen to our songs of praise. Hear the confession of our lips. See that the promise God made has been fulfilled. Where he has caused his name to be honored, he’s truly come to you and blessed you!

And it sure was not because of us! Look at the Israelites. See anything familiar? Doubts, rebellion, complaints and quarrels, yet God continued to provide for them. 40 years later he brought them to the Promised Land, overpowered their enemies, and made them the centerpiece of true worship of the living God. The gates of hell could not stand against them. Even though many turned away from him in favor of the false gods of the world that appealed to their sinful hearts, God still caused his name to be honored among them. Centuries later he fulfilled the greatest of all his blessings. One evening in the village of Bethlehem he sent the world a Savior, who was Christ the Lord.

Trinity Lutheran Church owes everything to the mercy and grace of God in Christ. In spite of who we are, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. We praise him for the blood of Jesus, our Savior, which purifies us from all our wickedness, rebellion and unfaithfulness. We praise him for his patience, kindness, compassion, comfort and encouragement. We praise him for the awesome power of the gospel that created the miracle of faith in our hearts and delivers forgiveness and eternal life to us, to our children, to our neighbors, and to our world. We praise him for preserving his Word and for giving us a strong confession of its truth. We praise him for the privilege of being his lights in a world that desperately needs to know their Savior, too.

As we look back over the last 125 years here at Trinity Lutheran Church, we see God’s faithfulness. His hand of blessing has been on this congregation. Over and over again, we have seen how he loves and cares for his people. He has shown his love through this generation of faithful believers. Many are the people that God has called here and led away from here. Many are the blessings we can see and many more blessing that we cannot see. The lives restored and baptized, married, buried and confirmed in the love of God. Those who have been ministered to by faithful pastors, by the women of this congregation and the elders. The youth and adult taught in countless Sunday School and Bible classes. All of these blessings are from the hand God to us in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we are another year closer to the end of time and the day of Christ’s return. There is a greater sense of urgency. The devil is filled with anger because he knows that his time’s short. Life is moving faster as people try to squeeze as much as they can for themselves from every
moment. Life is increasingly more complicated. We are bombarded with distractions. People are restless, troubled, confused, desperate. The love of most is growing cold. Many Christians dishonor God’s name by no longer hearing it, believing it, or living according to it. What will the future bring for us, for your congregation, for God’s church on earth?

The men and women who formed this congregation faced those same fears, yet they were optimistic about the future. Why? Because the Lord had put his name on them. They were his, and if God was for them, who could be against them?

That is still true today. The Lord has brought us to such a time as this. The fields are as white for the harvest now as they were then. Sinners still need to hear the Bible’s clear, unconditional, simple message of law and gospel. That is the precious gift of our Lutheran heritage and the unstoppable strength of this congregation. And we still have so very much to do.

A lot of things have changed since we came here in Feb 2001. I’ve changed and you’ve changed too. For the most part, the church looks pretty much the same since it was dedicated in 1959. But think about it – Trinity’s celebrating 125 years! A lot has changed in those 125 years, some amazing changes in world. But one thing that has not changed is people are still sinners and need a Savior. And thankfully, by God’s grace, Trinity Lutheran Church has not changed its message of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

This congregation is now 125 years old. That is something worth celebrating. Yes, there have been challenges in the past, and because of Satan and sin, there will be troubles ahead. But we also know that triumph awaits too. We know this because God has guaranteed it with the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus. I rejoice with you today because I’ve been blessed to spend 17 ½ years serving you with the Gospel.

3,500 years ago, Israel was God’s church on earth. Humanly speaking, there was no reason why they should have survived. Not only did they survive - they thrived! It had nothing to do with them and everything to do with the Lord. As a regular part of their worship God told Aaron and his sons to bless the people by saying: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. He then explained: So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

For 125 years, in over 7500 worship services, that blessing has been spoken over the worshipers who gathered together in the name of the Lord. It is not just a nice touch at the end. It is a promise made by the God of all grace. Listen carefully to those words at the end of the service today and each time you come into God’s presence in this building. The Triune God is giving you the reason to be joyful, optimistic, and thankful in every single area of your life. He promises you: Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. Amen.

Pastor Keith Bilitz
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Alma City
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Smiths Mill