

A Journey Across 200 Years

Thomas Robinson, October 17, 2010

Heb 12:1-3

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a **great cloud of witnesses**, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the **race marked out for us**, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ **Consider him** who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will **not grow weary and lose heart**.

Hebrews 11:14-16

¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Acts 2:36-47

³⁶ *“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”*

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, *“Brothers, what shall we do?”*

³⁸ Peter replied, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, *“Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”*

⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. ⁴² **They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**

⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The Journey of Faith

One of the most powerful images of the life of faith is that of a journey, sometimes in the form of a long race, a marathon. Individual lives are such a journey. So is the life of a community or movement. We are heirs to a long history that helps us know who we are, where we have come from and where we are going. Examples from history inspire us and challenge us.

We strengthen ourselves, and perhaps learn humility, by learning how we build on the work of brothers and sisters of earlier generations throughout history and recent time. From the Paul and John to Justin and Irenaeus to Constantine, Augustine and Francis of Assisi, to Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Anabaptists, to Alexander Campbell, we are influenced by all that went before for both good and ill. We learn to be faithful in our generation.

October is the anniversary of Luther's 95 Theses (almost 500 yrs) and Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* (201 yrs), a founding document of one of the main streams of the Restoration movement of which we are a part. Thomas and his son Alexander joined with Barton Stone in a movement to unify Christians by calling them to make Scripture alone the basis of their belief and practice and to restore the practices of the early church as far as possible in our own time. They began a thriving movement that today is manifested in congregations bearing a variety of names: Church of Christ, Christian Church, Disciples of Christ.

200th Anniversary of the Church of Christ in NYC

In Oct, 1810, the "Church of Christ at New York" began from group of immigrants from Scotland who started a new congregation called "The Church of Christ at New York." Strongly influenced by reformers John Glas and Robert Sandeman with emphasis on the authority of scripture, separation of church and state, weekly Lord's Supper, plural elders, baptism by immersion. Elders Henry Errett and William Ovington led the congregation.

They sent out a letter in 1818 (meeting on Sullivan St.) seeking others who wanted to follow the scriptures in a simple manner. Modeled their worship on Acts 2:42. Errett developed study of baptism for forgiveness of sins. Became part of the Stone-Campbell movement.

New York was the largest city in the U.S. Settled only up to Houston St. President James Madison was moving toward war with Britain. The church met in Watch House on later WTC site. Gradually moved north: 1850s on 17th St. Strong anti-slavery voice, ministry to soldiers during Civil War. 1870s on 28th St. 1890s on W. 56th St. 1910s on W. 81st St.

Period of struggle and division (1900) over "liberal theology," rejection of authority of scripture. Most of group became Park Ave. Chn. Ch. Some broke away and joined families from England and Georgia in 1920 to organize the Manhattan Ch. of Christ. They met on W. 69th St. First minister, Morgan Carter. In 1940, H. P. Reeves led congregation in obtaining large town house at 48 E. 80th. Harlem Ch begun. In the 1950s-60s Burton Coffman led the congregation in new building. Numerous church plants. Increasing diversity of people. Combination of people with roots in Ch. of Christ and many new adult believers.

Running the Race Marked Out for Us

We are still true to the intent of those who started the church in 1810 in most of their practices and especially in their desire to be guided by the scriptures in reaching a great city.

We are far more diverse with immigrants from many more places than Scotland.

But we are still serious in believing that the Bible is the most revolutionary book ever written. We are grateful that they pointed us to its power and life-transforming authority.