



1st Presbyterian Church of Salem

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From the Pastor on the 200th Anniversary of First Presbyterian Church, Salem, NJ

Much has been written about the rather contentious beginnings of the Presbyterian Church in Salem. A review of the historic records will reveal some fascinating stories and vignettes along with mundane details about building specs and finances. But the real story is found in the faith of those Presbyterians who would not be daunted by the many obstacles and difficulties they faced. They loved God and were ready to do what was required of them to establish a church committed to preaching, teaching and striving to live the unvarnished truth of God's Word to the glory of the Sovereign Lord.

Their faith, zeal and self-sacrifice bore fruit. Not long after building the first church it became clear that more room for worship and Sunday school was needed; consequently, an addition was built. In years following, interest continued to grow in the Reformed faith proclaimed and practiced until it became evident that a more commodious house of worship was required – and even then, after building the current structure, the congregation filled it to the doors!

As one might leaf through the various documents collected over the years of the history of FPC in Salem, you will find a great deal of information but only hints of an explanation as to why they were so committed to building a church in Salem despite the obstacles they faced. What so inspired them through the years to give of themselves and their resources so generously? And what continues to inspire Presbyterians to worship and serve here after 200 years?

What our history *really* points to are Presbyterian Christians who have, for 200 years, placed their trust in Christ alone who rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills; who have embraced the watchwords of the Reformation – grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone – that embody principles of understanding that motivate a life of faith; who have boldly affirmed the majesty, holiness and providence of God who in Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, creates, sustains, rules and redeems in the freedom of sovereign righteousness and love.

These Presbyterians preached of God's appointing a people for service as well as salvation. They upheld a life marked by a disciplined concern for order in the church according to the Word of God, and a faithful stewardship that seeks the proper use of God's good gifts. And they led by example opposition to tyranny, and called the people of God to seek justice and the freedom that comes from a joyful obedience to the will of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Celebrating 200 years of this rich witness to the Sovereign God of grace, First Presbyterian Church looks to the future with a humble thanksgiving for all God's good and perfect gifts. We continue to lift up the power and presence of God, and the Bible as God's Word to us by the Spirit. We are resolved to let our light shine forth as Christ commanded, to offer a beacon of hope to all seeking the love of God, and to make room for all who wish to worship in Spirit and walk in truth. Welcome to First Presbyterian Church of Salem, where there is a place for you!