

“Jesus Christ is the Same Yesterday...”
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

In preparing for today’s sermon I traveled to the Archives at Columbia Seminary to read the original documents of this church. As I turned the yellowed pages of the first minutes, I saw the handwriting of the first clerk and the names of the first elders: Carlisle and Martin, Wingfield and Overton. It was a fascinating trip back into history.

On February 5th, 1842, these men who had been part of a Presbyterian fellowship since 1821, met and asked the question: Is there any record of a church on this property? The answer was no, and they establish Madison Presbyterian Church.

- On the first Sunday of May the church was “dedicated to the service of the Lord” by the Rev. Francis Bowman. He preached from 1 Timothy 4:8 on how godliness holds promise both for the present and the future.
- That same evening they met to ordain their first officers. Rev. Francis Goulding preached from 1 Timothy 5:17 on how the ruling elders should be held in double honor for their labor.
- It wasn’t until October that they actually bought the property for \$500.

- In December they elected Dr. Alonzo Church as their first pastor. He preached once a month.
- New members, with names such as Killian and Speed, were received after giving testimony to the “state of their religious feelings” and showing evidence of “a change of heart.”
- There were a number of pastors who served as Stated Supply for many years. Of note was Rev. Axsen, the father of Mrs. Woodrow Wilson.

There were few records during the war. In April of 1863 a collection was approved for the “domestic missions” for religious literature to be distributed in the army. In October of ’64 the elders received two African-American members who had fled “in consequence of the presence of the enemy in Cassville when (they) left...” Cassville was burned to the ground only a few weeks later.

Other records, however, tell us about how women like Mrs. Caroline Foster kept things going during those trying times. Mrs. Foster would bring to church a tiny organ called a melodian, which she held in her lap and played for worship services. Two men withdrew membership rather

than tolerate that “wicked contraption,” considering it sacrilegious. It was this same Mrs. Foster who later, in 1875, had stained glass windows installed in place of plain ones. Some other notable moments:

- In 1880, Bible (in fellowship hall) was given.
- 1896 – Ladies Sewing Society supports a girl at Thornwell. In 1903, Sarah Cook establishes a memorial fund for Thornwell, the interest to be used to support a child there “as long as it may exist.” This was followed by more money in 1918 from Mrs. Billups.
- Our first recorded collaboration between the churches for VBS was in 1926, led by Rev. Dendy, just out of seminary.
- The brick wall was laid, with landscaping, in 1933; our first restroom was built in 1935.
- The first pastor’s “open house” was held in 1937 by Rev. and Mrs. Broomall.

I offer this snapshot of our great heritage to illustrate the point of today’s lesson, that we are to remember our leaders, consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith, with the understanding that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

- The same Jesus we worship today is the same yesterday who led a handful of Presbyterians to start this church and provide for its worship.
- The same Jesus Christ we honor today is the same yesterday whose call to service was honored by the first elders, pastors, men’s and women’s groups.
- The same Jesus who has brought you here is the same Jesus yesterday whose hospitality this church extended to strangers who came seeking the fellowship of Christ.
- The same Jesus we honor with our gifts and offerings today is the same yesterday who inspired members to give generously and joyfully to missions, programs and ministries of compassion to the orphaned and oppressed, the poor and imprisoned.

The faith of yesterday’s leaders and servants has made Madison Presbyterian Church the church it is today. So let us honor our great heritage toward a great future, and give as they gave, and serve as they served, “with joy and not with sighing.” For after all, from the beginning, we’ve been dedicated to the service of the Lord, and our godliness holds the promise of our future.