

The Komstad Mission Church:

(An article from the church's celebration of its Seventy-Fifth Anniversary in 1949)

It is seventy-five years since the last square-headed nail was driven into the first Komstad Church. The architectural design could hardly qualify as Gothic. It was just as plain and severe as its builders. Strong? Certainly. It was reinforced to withstand the sweeping winds of the prairies. The builders were Pioneers. Among them were teamsters, stone masons, carpenters, cabinet makers and (I suppose) designers, so the new project went forward with dispatch and was completed before the driving snows of winter.

Here it stood. At the time there was nothing but blue joint-grass to obstruct the view. And now, the building having been completed, it seems to me that I can see one of the builders step back a few paces in order to properly view the finished structure, and after a few moments of deliberation and perhaps a silent prayer, announce in a clear strong voice, "That building will stand." And stand it did for many years, but the ravages of time have long since crumbled it and its successor also.

The present edifice is the third in order of these structures, and nothing about it indicates that it was even thought of 75 years ago. Yet we have gathered to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Komstad Mission Church. Clearly it is not the birthday of the building we have in mind. The first builder said: "This building will stand!" That statement, I believe, requires spiritual interpretation, and we of the second, third and fourth generations are here today answering "present" to that roll call of the decades. The Komstad Church stands, and what is more important, it lives on this 75th Anniversary.

The occasion brings up the question of age. How old is it? How old are you? These are pointed questions, and we have only answered partially when we say, 75 years. Answers involving the question of age are sometimes evasive. When Jacob was forced down to Egypt in search of food, and upon being introduced to the great Pharaoh by an illustrious son, one of the first questions asked him was, how old are you? Jacob could have answered 130, but he did not. There was more involved than merely having lived 75 or 130 years. Jacob qualified his answer thus: "Few and evil have been the days and years of my life and they have not attained to the days and years of my fathers." In other words, his answer implied an admission on his part that he had not quite measured up to the high standard of living attained by his predecessors.

We say the Komstad Church is 75 years old. What's 75 years about it? Not this

building. Not a single member now living or present can arise and say: I was there at the first meeting, or, I too drove square nails into the first walls. There is one, and only one sufficient reason for this celebration: The Komstad Church lives! That fact alone justifies our assembling here for the purpose which we have stated.

Dead churches hold no further celebrations. Dead institutions take no pains to perpetuate themselves. Some of them do not even have a decent funeral. But this church lives on October 15, 1949, and the reason it lives is because men and women have walked in and out of her for all these 75 years. But they have not merely walked. They have thought. They have worked. They have prayed. They have sacrificed in the face of hardships from which most of us would shrink today. Perhaps we should make public admission of a fact, which I hope we have admitted to ourselves, at least privately. It is this: Churches No's. 1, 2, and 3 were built and paid for by the same generation of men. They were organized. They were established. They were placed upon such solid foundations (spiritually speaking) that this present Komstad Church, which stands today, is the lengthened shadow of the men who drove the first square nails. We may quite properly ask: "Where are the builders of 1949?"

There once was an Alexander. The Roman Empire resulted. There was a Bismarck. A great Germany resulted. There also was a Hitler. The once great Germany is now headed for the abyss of oblivion. Having a great past is no guarantee for a secure future. The question we should ask ourselves on this 75th anniversary of the Komstad Church is, "What kind of celebration will be here on the 100th and perhaps the 150th anniversaries?" The answer no longer depends on the men of 1874. We of the 1949 variety will, whether we like it or not, supply the answer.

History leads me to believe that the men who founded and builded the first church did not roll the logs down hill. I think they rolled up their sleeves and spat in their hands. A perusal of Church records clearly indicates that they were "go-getters." But what is more important, they were also "go-givers." And the results of their efforts stand out in bold relief and as a challenge to us on the 75th anniversary. How old are we? Perhaps we should admit with Jacob of ancient times: "We have not attained to the days and years of fathers."

From the foregoing it might be assumed that too much emphasis is placed on the value of human effort; that this church resulted because sturdy and strong men lived here and struggled, worked and sacrificed. All of these qualities are important. Without them progress is impossible. We may also be assured that, unless the Lord doth bless the work, they that labor, labor in vain. This then is also an opportune time for a little stock-taking. What did these original builders leave us in addition to church property and cometary grounds? These are all tangible things. Did we inherit, more

properly, did we appropriate any of those other qualities which evidently they not only possessed but put to daily use? What qualities were they? Let us see if we can remember some of them.

Altars

"Their children remember their Altars," so spake Jeremiah. And so do we. I do not believe it is an exaggeration to say there was a daily Altar in nearly every home. I am familiar with a number of them. They were maintained when the weather was hot and when it was cold. It was not set aside because the threshers came or unexpected company had come to the house. I have heard the elders pray for the church, for the pastor, for the community, and for themselves and their families. Apparently, the Lord heard those prayers. The Church lives today. Will it live tomorrow?

Arrangements

Success of any institution calls for preparation and arrangement. These were made on Saturday so that nothing would hinder attendance at Divine Services on Sunday. The buggy was washed, clothes were brushed, shoes were shined. The Sunday School Text was gone over, and then retirement early so that no one would be late on Sunday for services. This practice infused such vigor in the church that it sent it thundering down more than seven decades, and it lives in 1949.

Attendance

"I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people; in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem, Praise ye the Lord." These two verses from Psalm. 116 were not only read, they were applied, in the most literal sense. It could hardly be otherwise after having made the arrangements. This practice kept the church healthy, and it is the direct cause for the expansion which took place at regular intervals. This constitutes another challenge to those now living.

Assistance

The foregoing program cannot stop at the portals of the church, nor inside of it. It is reflected in the entire community and in other parts of the world. Missions were supported on a regular and systematic basis. There was an old-age assistance then, too. When some member required assistance, whether it was spiritual or temporal, it was supplied promptly and on the spot. Oh, no! They called upon no Public Charity Organization. They did it themselves in the most emphatic manner. Those now living will have no difficulty recalling cases which required years in their performance.

Somewhere in the book there is promise of regard for that kind of service. I think it has been claimed. Because of its doing, the "Church lives today."

Association

They associated with one another in the church and in their homes. There was genuine Christian hospitality, very little entertaining. Ministers of the Gospel were not unwelcome guests. They were sought after, and when they came the conversation and general attitude of the home required no particular upheaval. This, too, has promise of reward and, incidentally, resulted in stamina for the church.

Ashes

There are two questions which were frequently propounded. "Who is authority for the statement?" and, "What does Scripture say?" In other words, the founders were slow to accept questionable rumors or accept false doctrines. Gossip was promptly consigned to the ash-heap. They placed the best possible construction on any statement effecting their neighbor or their church. Is it any wonder that it still lives in 1949?

Assurance

I know! I know in whom I have believed. This was not merely sentiment. It was genuine knowledge. It was part of life itself. The element of doubt, if it ever existed, was exchanged for something more permanent through the study of the Word, through regular attendance in their church, through practicing and living the faith which they professed. These are some of the Lengthened Shadows which have survived through the decades. They have reached down to 1949, the 75th Anniversary of this Church. May we truthfully say, with them: "Oh, Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place for generations."