

From This Corner

Larry Baird

“A Powerful Pulpit”

It seems like a large part of my childhood was spent in the left back pew of my hometown church. It was an uncomfortable place. Worship was the longest hour of the week. God blessed me with parents who did not know, or at least did not let on they knew, that a child should not be expected to endure a full hour of “divine” worship. One day I clearly remember sitting in that pew with my brother. We were not about to escape as we were strategically lodged between mom and dad. A strange thing happened that Sunday. My attention was drawn to a man enthusiastically speaking to the gathered. I could not draw my eyes away. That man was The Rev. Donald Peck. He was, I am certain in retrospect, a powerful speaker. He was passionate about that which he spoke. I can still see him there on that given Sunday, standing behind the pulpit in his Geneva style robe. He was preaching as though he thought the word God had given him could actually do something. Oddly, though I was very young, I remember he was talking about the Exodus and speaking of the Church’s role in the civil rights movement. One of his illustrations profoundly moved my young heart. It was though a window had opened to my soul, and I remember seeing myself in Pastor Peck’s place preaching in that pulpit.

Recently I was invited back to preach in that church where long ago the first glimmer of my call to be a pastor had been sensed. It was an honor and especially so because the inviting pastor was The Rev. Jennifer Green who sat in the pews with her family while I was her pastor in Clarence. It was even more special because her mother, The Rev. Sharon Schaus, along with the family, was there to baptize the Green’s newborn son, William Edward. I also watched Sherri move from pew to pulpit during my years at Clarence.

So there I was, some forty-plus years later, standing in the pulpit and preaching. After the service I went to the pew where my family had once sat and glanced at the pulpit. Standing there and looking at an angle to the pulpit I knew something for certain. It is as God has said, “...so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”