

**Ron:** Today we are having another of those strange moments in our church life, a time when we try to look forward by pausing to look back. In the past two hundred years many people have come and gone in this church and this community. Some have been here and left their names on churches and roads, left families and homes, left farms and communities. Others have left only tombstones or decaying houses and still others lesser reminders than that: an indentation in a field where a road was once cut, initials on a Sycamore tree, a seemingly wild rose along a fencerow or daffodils that bloom each spring to greet a family whose home and even footprints have been washed away by the morning dew and scattered by the afternoon breeze.

**Randy:** We all wish to be remembered and remembered kindly and well. Today we'll pause to remember our friend Powell Johnson, who couldn't be remembered any other way. We remember a good and gentle man who loved his church and everyone, at least nearly everyone, in it, and certainly all its children. But we don't do this to give the family an excuse to get together or ourselves an excuse to get sentimental and nostalgic. To do that would be a disservice to our church and all that it represents, for it is a living being that looks forward with a hope and trust that constantly harking back to the "good old days." would betray. We don't remember Powell today to become wistful and tearful, we remember him because he's lending his name to the future.

**Ron:** Powell's family has provided for the children's section of the library to be completely overhauled and remodeled, with more books and new furniture and pictures and bright paint. They have done this in Powell's memory because of his love for all the children. The formerly damp, dark section of basement is now light and inviting because that was how Powell welcomed all the children, teasing and playing, gently correcting with a twinkle, never serious or threatening. Naomi's section of the library is like her, filled with information and study, full of history and wisdom. And Powell's section of the library is like him, filled with information but also fun, inviting the children in with furniture just their size and everything within their reach.

**Ina:** People like to say that children are the future of the church, and perhaps that is true. It seems like many of them leave just when they're getting old enough to become part of its present. But children are more than the future or this or any church, and the older I get the more I realize that children are the life and energy of the church and we need to do all we can to encourage them to feel like they're as important here as they are. So today, we dedicate this library wing to them and to all that they add to our church and to our lives. And it wouldn't hurt most of us grown-ups to go wander down there every once in a while, to escape this serious-minded grumpiness that seems to infest us all too often, and to lose ourselves in the bright and cheerful and optimistic world of the children that we spend so much time trying to drag them out of, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. Powell knew that and lived that, maybe we should too.

**Randy:** Probably no one will be surprised to learn that we're going to end this little dedication service a tad bit unusual. Powell would have hated being the center of all this attention and he would have grown restless with the passages just read and we

can all imagine what sort of things he would have already whispered to Mary Ann and Sandra about this dedication service. That's why we're going to end the dedication with a song. Powell loved to sing, but that's not why we're doing it. We're singing this song because it's Christmas time and the birthday calendar wasn't available last week, so we missed recognizing a few birthdays. One of Powell's friends who loved children and music too had a birthday last week, and Powell wouldn't want us to not mention her. Many of us spent our childhood singing with her and listening to her and Verna sing this song. Last Friday was Dell Walker's birthday, so oddly enough we'll end the dedication service of the Powell Johnson Children's Library by standing and singing, "Beautiful Star of Bethlehem."

Hymn: Beautiful Star of Bethlehem

**Roger:** Closing Prayer: Lord, here we are again, coming to your house to worship you and to try to serve others in your name. Powell's family has given us this children's library, and we're giving it to you. Use it, and us, to help reach our children for you. Remind us that all the children we encounter are your children, just like we are, and that they need us like we need you. Help us to encourage and teach, to smile more and complain less, and let us never forget that "red or yellow, black or white, they are precious" in your sight. We're your body on the earth, help us to do a better job of being your eyes to see as you see, so that we too can love "all the little children of the world."