

Faith...A Public Work
By Rev. Damaris Whittaker

Luke 21:5-19
Center Church-The First Church of Christ
In Hartford
November 17, 2013

Let us pray.

Friday evening, I was the keynote speaker at the Christian Activities Council Award Dinner, celebrating their 162 years of service and *Breaking Barriers and Building Communities* in the City of Hartford.

After the event had culminated, I was walking to my car with my husband and Edward Turner, a member of this church, was on the other side of the parking lot and he noticed that we were not in our usual car.

So, he asked, when did you people get a red minivan? So, proceeded to get closer and I began to explain to Edward that my car had broken down that day. As I took a left onto a street, the car just stalled and stopped moving. So, I went on to tell him the story of having to tow my car to my mechanic in Middletown.

Calling Enterprise to come and pick me up (because they say “we’ll pick you up”) and ultimately renting a car.

Edward did not say anything. But he gave me a hug, and he started to pray—out loud, but with a soft voice—in the middle of the parking lot.

At first, I thought he was joking, because he said something like, “Oh God, I know that trials and difficulties will come, but I pray that I you do not give these to Damaris so close together.” (I thought that was funny, so I laughed.)

But, I noticed that Edward was not distracted by my laughter, he continued to pray and then I realized that this was a genuine prayer. So I closed my eyes and allowed him to finish.

There we stood, outside in the middle of the parking lot at 9:00 pm, praying out loud; and at the end of that prayer, I felt ministered to, my spirit was touched, and I was grateful.

Many times, we need to cease platforms so that our faith becomes a public work and most of those times it is the Spirit that leads us -- we do not plan it.

In the scripture reading this morning, Jesus talks about destruction that was to come--first, the destruction of the temple, which was a symbol of identity spirituality, and yes, God among the people.

Now, this temple was magnificent - it was stunning, it was immense. Commentaries say that it held about 400,000 people. Herod had over built it to surpass the other pagan temples as a competition with rival rulers.

Although there was an investment from the “oppressor” into this temple, *the temple was the temple* and it meant everything to the people.

Then, Jesus speaks about natural disasters and wars, but he calls for us not to be alarmed, and he proposes that the “trials and difficulties” that come are actually opportunities to witness.

Further, Jesus points out that we will be equipped to speak and respond when situations arrive.

The challenging part of this scripture, I would submit, is not that difficult days will come, but is that the instructions are “do not prepare.”

What?? In a world where we like to have plan A, B, C, D & E. Jesus is saying “trials will give you an opportunity to witness, so make up your minds not to prepare in advance.”

This contradicts everything that we know and believe. Is Jesus challenging us to live in the moment?

The truth is that, “because we cannot control the future we fear it. We want to predict, control, explain and order it. Living in the moment is a continual Spiritual struggle.”¹

There is a 12-Step acronym: F.E.A.R. is Forgetting Everything’s All Right.

This is exactly the message from Scripture this morning. Difficulties may come, but don’t stay there, turn the page. At the end, during the most difficult situations, God is going to see us through.

In the interim, let us use those difficult moments as a platform to exercise our faith.

So, I invite us this morning to recognize that, through our work in the Church, God is forming us as a public work.

This is why the deacons of this church and I have been intentionally talking about prayer for the last couple of months. We want to revitalize the prayer list, among other things.

So, we are embarking in “Faith as a public work” journey.

Within the next few weeks, our prayer list will be a living wall. When we come in for worship, we will be given a bulletin and then we will be invited to write a prayer request on a sticky note, and we will be asked place it on the glass in the back. Each week, we will pray for those requests.

We will invite the visitors and children to add their petitions to the living prayer wall. And each week, we will begin with a clean wall, so that we are coming to God in prayer with intentionality and purpose -- not as a ritual or routine.

¹ Living by the Word, Christian Century, November 13, 2013, pg 20.

This is a way of offering ourselves as a public work to the community. And, I hope that we continue to look for other ways.

May the God of hope give us the courage to trust during our times of trouble, and may we seize the opportunities to testify and witness knowing that the words and wisdom will come. Amen.