



Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and
Neighborhood House
Sunday, September 18, 2011

Artifact of cladding from the rubble of the
World Trade Center on display here at last
night's performance of
Performing Tribute 9/11

*Thank you to all who made this amazing evening of witness and healing
a reality. Truly, this is a spiritual place in the real world.
And that is not always easy.
And that difficulty does not deter us.*

Readings:

Paul to the Philippians 1:20-30

Matthew: 20: 1-16

Bulletin and Audio online at www.janhus.org

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In this morning's reading, Paul states:

As long as I am alive and in this body, there is good work for
me to do,

If I had to choose right now, I know which I'd choose. **Hard
choice!**

The desire to break camp here and be with Christ is powerful.
Some days I can think of nothing better.

But most days, because of what you are going through, I am
sure that it's better for me to stick around here.

So I plan to be around awhile, companion to you as your growth
and joy in this life of trusting God continues.

Paul's letter to the Philippians is such a celebration. A celebration of knowing God and one another and having only excitement about the world to come and being with the Christ he loved – and great joy about working with others here, “sticking around awhile,” being a companion to others on their journey of trusting in God. **Hard Choice**, such is his mission to help others. [Airplane story/Rapture]

There are some days I feel that. And most of the time I feel that is because I have been around others who remind me to feel that.

Do you know what I mean?

Sure, I can find this in reading and meditation in quiet times. And I do that.

But the best times for me to reminder and “find” such things is when I am around others who are remembering or living a life in such a way that it shows the remembering –

And without thinking – I am right there. Picked up, lifted up, and carried along.

The power of community and the natural (supernatural) presence of God in such a place (as here) is not to be underestimated.

Last night is a good example. We gathered to watch a performance of six individuals and the producer tell their stories about 9/11. In your bulleting, you have a copy of the program that gives you information about upcoming performances, but more important are the brief bios of those who performed a part of their life-narrative for the 40 or so of us gathered in our little theater downstairs.

By the time they spoke of escaping from the building, survivors of North and South Towers alike; by the time they finished speaking about the evacuation from their homes in the surrounding areas, their volunteerism that followed, the loss of family, and a wife and mother who talked about the loss of her husband, a first responder firefighter

and member of Squad 41 – all of whom were lost and among the 343 firefighters killed on that day....

By the time it was over, one might have suspected bitterness and anger – some of which was evident in the audience’s questions – but none of which was any longer present in the performers. It was, in a word, “stunning and very deep.”

Each spoke of the community that came together following the attack; the support of others; the need for therapy and help; but the community that – at least one presenter – said he missed once the work of clean up had been done.

They weren’t running from the attacks of 9/11, they moved toward it, each in different ways, and had somehow transcended it and became someone more, forming something other, and it was easy to see the ease and calm of the group – compared to the struggle of the audience, in some cases. They were and are clearly in a different place.

Wonderfully, they lingered for us to see their spirit rising above what had happened – not forgetting by any means, for as one said, “The wounds are still there” but they had healed and grown stronger. Two responded with sharing how their faith had gotten them through; some indicated that there was no faith tradition in their life – yet even those folk recognized something in the human spirit that was greater than what had occurred – something in the human spirit greater than the destruction of the WTC. Greater than their loss.

And each, in their own way, expressed the joy they had in their lives today – explaining that by talking about their lives and the impact of 9/11 – they came even more closely into that place of strength, community, and joy in each other’s company – never forgetting their loss **or** their joy.

It was simply remarkable. And as we left and said our “good-byes” they were thanking us who were thanking them. Think about that.

And today's readings are not lost on us. Matthew talks this morning about the familiar story of the vineyard owner who calls workers at different times of the day and pays those who worked for 8 hours the same as those who worked for 1 hour – all having agreed to the same wage when hired.

His question when those who had worked all day complained to them was: ***“Are you going to get stingy because I am generous?”***

The generosity of those who spoke last night did not change the hearts of all those here or elsewhere who still might be carrying the gnawing anger of 9/11; the political conspiracy theories that intensify the anger and rage....but their generosity had to give everyone pause. Something like:

Can I still hold on to my resentments or refusals to let go – when those who have lost so much, perhaps more than most of us – have been able to move on?

Last week we spoke about forgiveness, mercy, and grace – last night we saw each of those in person – in persons.

Later in Matthew, Jesus talks about ***The Great Reversal***. The Great Reversal that those who have less, those who come last, will be among the first to enter the kingdom of heaven – a kingdom that is God, just as all things are God. In other words, entry is always available and any point in time, which in the kingdom of God has no meaning anyway. Never a place either – but a presence, here, now.

I saw an example of The Great Reversal evident in Philippians and in last night's performance: that instead of letting the affairs of this world dictate the spirit – the spirit that so many see as weak – instead we saw the reverse: the power of the spirit that rises above it all, lifting one another in the community's where we talk with one another and build enough trust to let the spirit rise – as widely and broadly as God's mercy.

Taking us and all those around us with them. It happened last night. I know, not because I saw it – even though I did – but because I felt it.

In the moments when we share, to pray together, to break bread as we do each week, to talk with one another – Paul's joy, God's Spirit, and our reversal are all being served as well.

May you feast and find abundance in the food at our table, the community we share, the lives we have lived, and the spirit in each other – for all and more are such things of God and the Kingdom of God, which is one and the same.

God bless you all.

Amen.