

Date: Sunday September 6, 2009

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-5 / James 2:1-17

Title: “Out of Nothing”

The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): God creates! Out of darkness and a formless void God has created heaven and earth. We are called and invited to do the same.

The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): God creates! That was, is, and always will be very good news!

(Remember, it’s all about God!)

A woman was putting her four year old daughter to bed one evening. The little girl wanted to hear a story so the mom decided to share the story of the prodigal son. After reading the story the mom and the daughter talked about the young son who had taken his inheritance, left home, and spent all the money. The two talked about how eventually the son couldn’t even eat as well as the pigs and so he went home to his father who welcomed him. When the mom and the daughter had finished talking, the mother asked the daughter what she had learned. The daughter after thinking for a moment replied, “Never leave home without your credit card” (Dyck)!

The little girl was adamant about the lesson she learned from that story. Today, the letter of James is adamant that we are to “be doers of the word and not merely hearers only” (James 1:22, NRSV) and that “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:17, NRSV). There is no question that James has definite ideas about what it means to live a life as a Christian. But James’ words aren’t just

demands, they can be and should be, thought of as invitation.

This week we approach the eighth anniversary of the 9-11 attacks. The image from that day that stays with most of us is the site of those huge towers highlighted in the bright sunshine of a September morn with smoke pouring from them. They looked like two gigantic smoke stakes. I remembering seeing them and the billowing smoke and saying out loud in a room full of people but to no one in particular, “What a horrendous site.” Then, later, is the image of watching those magnificent structures come crashing to the ground. It’s no wonder that those images are a freeze frame in our minds as the news reports of the attacks were played over and over again. I heard about one woman who reported watching the towers fall over one hundred times just in the two day period of September 11 and 12. I remember flying over the world trade center site three weeks after the attack. What a stark impression seeing that gigantic empty hole of where those two skyward towers once stood. Whatever our personal experiences during that attack eight years ago and the following days, we all have images that will stay with us forever.

What we didn’t see so much of and what we probably don’t remember so well is the generous outpouring of care and compassion following the 9-11 attack. All around the world, nations offered words of sympathy not to mention offers of help that poured in from other countries to our own. And here at home, communities responded all across this country with thoughts, prayers, and actions. It was a time of overflowing support.

In the city of New York City there was an over abundance of giving. People made their way down to the disaster site with toiletries, clothing, and food. The Red Cross was swamped with people willing to stand in line for hours and give blood. Many people were turned away because the agency was so overwhelmed by the generosity that they simply couldn't accommodate all the potential blood donors. Plus, there wasn't enough storage space to keep all the items that people wanted to give. The willingness to give in whatever way needed flowed abundantly like the two rivers flowing alongside the island of Manhattan.

This outpouring of goodness, this spectacular picture of assistance, is a glimpse of the human family at its very best. In the midst of actions that define our very worst, comes a reaction that showcases our very best. There seems to be something built right into our very being that compels us to contribute, create, and counter chaos with our own ordered attempts to make something out of the aftermath of such horrible attack.

This sort of response to evil, this desire to make something out of nothing may be us at our most human and our most divine. This sort of activity, bringing good out of bad, is quite close to that of Genesis 1, a portion of which we read here today, with God creating the heavens and the earth. God, in God's incredible power and ability to create, made something out of nothing, form out of the void, and light out of dark. Within the glorious creation of Almighty God also came the creation of humanity. And not only were we created but we were created and commissioned to create. It's as if God said, "I have enjoyed making something out of nothing

and now you, too, should go and try.” Not only are we put in the midst of God’s creation as part of the creation, but God gives us a part to play in creation.

But we haven’t always been good at that part. 9-11 is a reminder that we fall short of the commission bestowed upon us. There are events in our human history that could form a long list of ways we have spoiled God’s call to be creators. But even within the tragic events of our human history there are more events that we could list that show the positive ways that we have tried to make a difference, that we have given to each other, and that we shared with God the goodness that we have known in our lives. We are not just destroyers but we truly are creators. We continually respond to the chaos, disorder, and mess we have made with more goodness and creation (Willimon).

In the summer of 2005, there wasn’t much happening around this church building. Yes, there was Bible school and it was a great week of Bible school in 2005 just as it was in 06, 07, 08, and 09. We still had a pre-school going in 2005 but it wasn’t in session during the summer. During the summer itself, and specifically during lunchtime, it was pretty quiet here beyond the regular activities of church. But in 2006 things changed. The summer become quite a busy time. What happened that was different in the summer of 2006 compared to the summer of 2005? That’s right, Food 4 Kids started in 2006.

Now we have just completed the fourth year of Food 4 Kids and as mentioned this morning over 5900 meals were served this summer. According to my calculations that would make a total of about 12,500 meals served over the course

of all four years. That probably translates into somewhere around 750 people that have had a free meal at Immanuel, Taylor Chapel, or Wesley Methodist these past four years. The majority of those people and those meals have been served right here at Immanuel and every meal served in all three locations has been connected to our church.

The true importance of the program, though, is beyond the numbers. Every meal that has been served has been served with prayer. The people that have come into our Food 4 Kids program have been greeted with a smile, offered a kind word, they have been fed, and have been invited back. We have gotten to know people; we've helped people, and even had people attending Food 4 Kids become church attendees and members. The words from that very first summer still sum up the program best: lunch, laugh, love, and the Lord.

Now I don't want to exaggerate and say that the program has made something out of nothing. But if you think back to the activity in the fellowship hall during lunchtime in the summer of 05 and compare it to the activity in the fellowship hall during lunchtime of the summer of 2009, I'm sure you would agree there was something happening. And that something, not surprising, is a result of our faith. That something is what James writes about in his letter. That something is the hands and hearts of human children seeking to do the will of God in this very time and place that we find ourselves. That something is the creation that God call us to and that something is fulfilling the very purpose of our creation. Yes, the more I think about it, and as your pastor, I would declare we have made something out of

nothing.

William Willimon shares a story this week in [Pulpit Resource](#) about little children coming out of a kindergarten class and each of the children are holding something in their little hands that they created. This time it was little dishes made out of clay. The faces of the children were bright with joy as they showed off their creations and exclaimed their joy at what they made. A child takes great joy in knowing that they contribute to the big, grown-up, adult world that can seem so confusing and overwhelming (Willimon).

Well today we are reminded that we are all children of God. Our world can seem confusing and overwhelming. Like the little girl hearing the story of the prodigal son, we don't always get the lesson right and we might be too focused on the credit card. But as children of a creating, loving, and forgiving God, we can always relish in the knowledge of being able to open our arms and say to our God who calls us to create, "Look God at what I am doing with my life" and we can know that God cares. So today, as a faith community living its faith, like we are created to do and like James invites us to do, we lift up our hands to God and we say, "Look God at what we are doing in this very place." And God sees that it is good. Let us pray.

God,

We do give you thanks for creating us and calling us to create. You have blessed us; you enable us to share with others, and to make something out of nothing. We offer

a special word of prayer for the children, adults, and families we have served this summer and we look towards the possibilities that we have to serve in your name. For all blessings we offer our praise and we pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

Offering:

The money that we give can be used to faithfully make something out of nothing. Let us give generously. The ushers will please come forward.

Dedication:

Lord we ask that you accept and bless this offering as we prepare to use it for your purposes in multiple ways. Using it for you is good. This we pray, Amen.

Benediction:

Go forth, sing praises, and putting your trust in God. Go forth prepared to serve in the name of our Lord and go forth blessed by God. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Dyck, Drew; Let My People Laugh; Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN; 2009.

Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.

Pulpit Resource; Logos Productions: Inver Grove Heights, MN; 2008.