

SERMON: *Guarding the Good Treasure*

October 2, 2016 - Dolly Cardwell

It is hard to believe that another year has rolled around. The Church of the Covenant celebrates its 62nd birthday today! And what a year this year has been! Fall time is always nostalgic to me as I associate recommitment with falling leaves, cooling weather, apple cider, gingersnaps and nuts, the beginning of a new school year and of course, our fall retreat! This year has been marked with more letting go than usual. David's and Kaye's departure to Kentucky and all that surrounded it has been huge. Rachel's death and the hole in each of our hearts have put us in recovery mode. P. G.'s death marks the end of an era for those of us who cherish the leadership of his family over the past half-century. Though we are well into the 21st century, "God is still speaking," as our United Church of Christ denomination often reminds us- here at 4415 Boonsboro Road and across our troubled world! What a blessing it has been for me to dwell for eighty percent of my life right here!

This year, we are facing the challenging task of seeking and finding, a minister, a pastor, a leader. Do our Old Testament scripture readings this week resound with you as they do with me, as I consider our own exile from leadership? In Psalm 137, the people of Israel, just as could be said of us, remember Jerusalem, their home complete with the temple which for them was God's dwelling place.

In Lamentations, we continue to lament over the destroyed and lonely city of Jerusalem. Reading in verse 7, "Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and wandering, all the precious things that were hers in the days of old." This whole passage is lament pouring forth from a people perceiving themselves as God-forsaken; their way of life including their place of worship, in tatters and ashes. The Church of the Covenant remembers the precious days of David's and Kaye's leadership- David's ceaseless focus on the importance of the devotional life, the richness of music in our worship, poignant sermons every Sunday and vibrant Wednesday morning Lectionary gatherings! We remember the fullness of Children Worship and Wonder, and the café, and the book group under Kaye's leadership! Couple this loss with that of our precious Rachel and our dear P. G. and we must summon all our resources to remember "Emanuel- God with us"; Advent

is but two months away. Some of us still remember the days of Bev Cosby's leadership- his contagious and courageous focus of our energy and enthusiasm for ministry outward- in the Lodge, the Wood Ministry, and in a myriad of other missions which tackled the most glaring needs in our city! The following words ring true for us just as for the author of Lamentations: 'for these things, we weep; both of our eyes flow with tears, for a comforter is far from us, one to revive our courage.' Well, the people of Israel survived the Exile and even the destruction of their temple. Their resilience and determined hope can increase our faith and help inspire and propel us to what God has in store for us. We had a wonderful retreat yesterday with about a dozen of us attendance; I believe our courage was revived in the silence and the fellowship that we shared. We are a strong community. We have the spiritual concern and support of many friends far and near. We are stewards of this sacred land and these lovely buildings which house our worship and our work. We have our life together – the rare gift of community- and a beautiful leadership opportunity, complete with a home if so desired, just waiting for the special person whom God might steer our way! We remember! Memory is hope!

I am convinced that it was none other than the Holy Spirit, who saw to it that our passage from II Timothy was included this week. To be sure young Timothy and his community were set in a different time and place from our own, but can you align yourself with him as I can- as he listened to his elder, his mentor Paul, counseling him to rekindle the gift of God that is in him, the grace of being called to a holy calling- the good treasure that was at work in him by the presence of the Holy Spirit? I think this passage is hand-picked for us on this Commitment Sunday! At this time of year we are rekindling everything within us that bears witness to the worth and the value of this jewel of our life together, this good treasure, and we are putting our lives on the line toward its survival and its thriving.

Certainly we need all hands on deck this year. Each of us brings our own unique self- our upbringing, our family, our friends, our experience, our education, our gifts, our own special church history to the reading of the scripture, to the understanding of our covenants, and to this moment of commitment. Now you may not be making a commitment, as in Covenant or Community commitment, this morning but you are in our midst. Something brought you here. Our motivation for any decision we make or any

commitment we make is a study in itself. It is complex and unique for each of us. This is why we, here in our church love stories. We love to hear each other's stories and we tell our own- in mission groups and even in worship, usually at first with fear and trepidation but as time goes on, with love and an increasingly acquired sense of belonging.

Understanding the scripture has become one of my favorite past times. I think the love of it is in my DNA. As far back as the mid-1500's, my Swiss Anabaptist Stover forebears wrestled with issues of faith which for them were matters of life or death. I do not forget their faith! Fast forward a few centuries! Kindled by the love of my family, my religion professors at R-MWC- Drs. Penick, Thelen, and Pemberton, fueled further by walking into the history that was to come of this Church of the Covenant community and being privileged to be a part of the formative Wednesday night School for Christian Living in the early days, where I received an equally excellent sousing in Scripture, followed by David's time with us and our continuingly vibrant Wednesday morning Lectionary worship and study, mine too is the journey of a lifetime. Founding members Ann Stubbs, Jim Ould, Jack and Bev Cosby have joined the great cloud of witnesses as well as Jo Ann McClure, John Withrow, Beth Mahler, Margaret Nelson, Rachel Wilson, P. G. Cosby, to mention only a few. Through them and so many others, including all of you! – all saints in my book- I have been steeped in the faith in this little community- from the study and contemplation of the faith, the practice of silence, prayer and the inward journey to the living out of the faith in mission, service and the outward journey to our brothers and sisters and our troubled world and everything in between.

I am grateful for the ministry of Bev Cosby and David Edwards. I am grateful for the writings of all the theologians that I have studied:

- for Harry Emerson Fosdick and Dr. Walter Brueggemann whose writings I regularly turn to these days for comment on Scripture;
- for Matthew Fox who introduced me to original blessing.
- for Henri Nouwen who helped me see how each of God's children needs love and to be beloved by another.

for the holy callings of Holmes Rolston and Michael Morwood who helped me and lots of other folks "get it," to understand that the inter-connectedness of all of creation and the dark universe is not unrelated and must be factored, into a congruent faith in the 21st century.

I am grateful for you- your presence, your story, your company along the way. Each of us is somewhere along our journey of faith. Factoring in all our loses, I think it can still be said that those of us who are making, for the first time, or renewing our commitment this morning, are as committed and as strong in our faith and love for God and for this community, as ever. We plan to continue the journey together, continuing to evolve together and to take responsibility for the well-being of this small part of the Body of Christ in the world. We will be focused on our inward journeys, our outward journeys, the quality of our Sunday worship, the missions of our mission groups and on actively seeking our next pastor in the months ahead. Life is still deepening and moving forward, enriched by the nutrition created by the Holy Spirit in our midst and by each other. And so yes, we wait. We remember all those gone before us. We pray for Strength for today and Bright Hope for tomorrow. Memory is hope. God is still speaking! May God bless each of us as we guard our good treasure and continue the journey together!