

**April 22, 2012**

**Dotty Whittier**

Carrie Pericola asked me to speak on behalf of the Stewardship Committee about my faith journey.

Sundays mornings have always meant church for me. When I was little that meant Sunday school and Junior Choir, and as I got older, Pilgrim Fellowship Youth Group and youth retreats. This was always followed by wonderful family dinners, usually roast beef with all the fixings, accompanied by my dad's classical music records. He was trying to teach my sister and me an appreciation of classical music. However, as a result, whenever I now hear Beethoven's Fifth Symphony I begin salivating for roast beef and when I have roast beef, I think of Beethoven's symphony and those childhood Sundays.

As a young adult, I, too, struggled with questions of unwarranted suffering or tragedy. And, though the mantra of the '70s was that a woman could "have it all", I certainly did not have all the answers. The people I most admired in different areas of my life were people of faith. They met the challenges of life with strength and wisdom and depended on a Source greater than themselves. My faith deepened as I witnessed how God could change a person and how faith in action could make a difference.

Let me share two examples of God working in my life. In the first example, it was a beautiful July day in 1989. Gage and I had taken our daughters, Laurel and Paige, then 5 and 2, to the Mystic Seaport in Connecticut and were on our way to Boston for an esplanade concert. Suddenly the head gasket in our car blew. Well, that changed our plans, but we still made it to Boston for the weekend. On Sunday, when Gage took the bus home to New York to go back to work, the girls and I stayed behind with family to wait for the car. At 5:30p.m. the next night, Gage called and said, "We just lost our roof". I replied, "Do you mean a few shingles from this thunderstorm?" Gage replied, "No, the whole second floor of the house is gone". Our townhome complex had been hit by a tornado and thirty-two units had been destroyed. Amazingly, no one had been seriously hurt. Gage had decided to get out of his company car and go running instead of filling out his paperwork, as was his usual habit. A tree trunk went through the back window of the driver's side where he would have been. The little toddler next door had gotten out of his crib and walked downstairs to his dad for the first time just before the tornado hit. And, our girls would have been upstairs in the tub at that time, while I would have been preparing dinner in the kitchen. The head gasket problem with the car had kept the girls and me safe in Massachusetts. No one could ever tell me that it was a coincidence; God was looking out for us.

The blessings continued in what could have been a tragedy. The sun shone for the next seven days so people could move out. Many people, including our pastor and church friends helped us. The local grocery stores and delis served three meals a day for a week – gratis. We stayed with one set of friends for a few days and then with our pastor and his wife for two weeks while we looked for a place to live. The church stored all our furniture for three months.

More recently, in 2007, God again stepped in. We were trying to move back to Massachusetts from New York. Our parents were not doing well, one daughter was out on the West Coast in law school, and the other was in college at Endicott. It seemed the right time to make the move back to Boston that we had always planned. I took a teaching job in Concord and moved up to Melrose in August. Gage had stayed behind to sell our house, and we took turns driving each weekend to visit each other that fall. Over Thanksgiving weekend we learned that the pending sale on our home looked like it would fall through and that Gage's job transfer had disappeared. It looked like our carefully laid plans were not to be. We prayed really hard and then just left it in God's hands. Well, our house sold in January and another job transfer came through for Gage that was a better working situation and a shorter commute. It was nothing we could have planned.

We first became members of Centre Congregational Church in 1982. The pastor, Mark Strickland, had been Gage's youth pastor. We were welcomed and immediately felt at home. I remember Barbara Becker invited me to join her wheel. Then we moved to New York for Gage's job. When we moved back in 2007, we decided to rejoin Centre Church and have been blessed. We joined with Nancy Lauzon and Mary McCarthy who have become friends and are active members, each in their own way. One of the first people we met was Chuck Cotting who invited me to join the Membership Ministries Committee.

Membership Ministries focuses on the fellowship aspect of our church. Jesus calls us to "produce good fruit, that is good deeds for God." Romans 7:4. Working with the members of the committee to create opportunities for building our faith community has been a joy. From the name tags that make us feel welcome, to the treats brought to potential parishioners, to the weekly coffee which allows us to stop for a minute and talk to people, Membership endeavors to make each person feel valued. And who would ever think that making pies could be so much fun? Or the June Fest, Ipswich Boat Cruise or Fall Potluck/Bingo? February's Trivia/Silent Auction demonstrated how much fun a multi-generational game night can be. It is so important to extend our faith into our everyday lives to celebrate the joys and support each other in the difficult times. Our Centre church family was right there supporting us when Gage's mom died.

In closing, Centre Church is doing God's work, through his people, making a difference. Dennis is a true pastor, with meaningful worship and a caring and compassionate spirit. Brittany shared how our dynamic youth program is changing lives. Our service is taped each Sunday so shut-ins can experience worship. The choir shares their faith and talent as they sing each Sunday. Members contribute their time and resources to various outreach programs such as Heifer International and Bread & Roses. And the list goes on. Faith in action. I wonder what God has planned for us next?