

THE TOWER

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Park Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
Worshiping in Davis Chapel
111 Park Avenue
Worcester, MA 01609
Telephone: 508-752-2468

E-mail: parkchurchucc@juno.com

Website: www.parkcongregationalchurch.org



www.facebook.com/ParkCongregationalChurch

The Rev. Dr. Gary R. Shahinian, Minister

Telephone: 508-756-5667

Cell: 508-451-8785

Fax: 508-753-7354

E-mail: shahinian.bogosian@juno.com

A NOTE FROM THE MINISTER

“Where Was God During the Boston Marathon Bombings? Right There!”



Once again our nation has witnessed a terrorist attack that has resulted in death and injury. This time it was eerily too close to home. On April 15, at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, two explosions ripped through the street. During the next several days, two suspects were chased down, one killed, and the other apprehended after a complete lockdown of Boston and several of its suburbs. The result of all this carnage is four dead (not counting one of the suspects) and 282 persons injured, many severely with loss of limbs.

Whenever a horrific ordeal like this occurs, the question is raised, “Where is God?” What is really being asked here is “Why didn’t God prevent it?” The assumption behind this question is that God is all-loving and all-powerful, and so, could have prevented it. This belief is both right and wrong.

It is true that God could have prevented the Boston Marathon tragedy. It is not true that God could have prevented it unilaterally, that is, all by Godself.

God has created the world in such a way that each being, especially human

beings, has its own space within which to do its own thing. God does not interfere with this personal space. God has established an order to the creation so that it has its own integrity. The laws that govern the created order will not be suspended, violated, or overruled by God. To imagine that would be a misguided model of how God works. That model would assume that God resides in a “supernatural” realm and every created thing resides in a “natural” realm. If God wanted to do anything in the “natural” realm, God would need to enter it from the “supernatural” realm. Such a view presupposes that God is not already present in the “natural” realm and needs to penetrate it from the outside.

But God is already present in the “natural” realm. God is present everywhere, one of the divine attributes being omnipresence. God has created the world in such a way that God never does anything apart from creation. God works within creation, partnering with some physical being or beings within creation, very often human beings, to accomplish the divine ends.

You cannot find a single instance in all

of the Bible where God performs something without employing some being or aspect of the created world. Not even miracles. Not even the original act of creating the physical universe.

When God parted the Red Sea, God used the wind, the water, and the shape of the delta to produce a path of dry ground allowing the Israelites to journey across to the other side.

Even the “Big Bang,” the original act of creation that brought the physical universe into being needed the cooperation of almost 14,000,000,000 years of evolution to bring about the world that we see today.

Why am I spending time explaining this? Because it all relates to the misguided use of freedom exercised by the Tsarnaev brothers in carrying out the bombings.

Would it have been better if God stopped the Tsarnaevs from building bombs and detonating them in a place where hundreds of people were gathered? It certainly would have. But God doesn't work that way.

If God were to interfere with my human freedom every time that I was about to do something wrong, there would be no integrity to my freedom. It would no longer be *my* freedom. Multiply that

times over 7,000,000,000 people. Multiply that by the power possessed by nonhuman life, such as the innumerable molecules that compose earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes. If God were to interfere with the way those molecules come together to create devastating natural calamities, then the whole created order would be out of whack.

The same physical law of gravity that keeps us grounded upon the earth despite the fact that the earth is spinning at the rapid pace of 1,044 miles an hour (!!!) is part of the interrelated web of physical laws that produces earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes. It works both ways. The same laws that produce much good in the world, allowing food to grow and cells to regenerate, also allow poisons to sprout and cancer to spread.

If God were to suspend, violate, or overpower my freedom whenever evil would be the result, I would no longer appreciate my freedom. It would no longer be valuable. I would no longer receive any satisfaction from doing something good because I would automatically be prevented by God from doing something bad. I would not be able to learn from my mistakes if God were to bail me out every time I was about to do something wrong.

What kind of world would that be?

Pretty boring, actually. Think about it. If God were to prevent every instance of evil, if everything that occurs would automatically result in a blessing, if every human choice without exception would result in something good whether intended or not, what would be the value of life? Where would we find meaning? What would give us the energy or motivation to do anything?

The stale old argument against the existence of God that an all-loving and all-powerful God would not allow even a single instance of evil--never mind the obscene amounts of evil we find in the world today and throughout history--no longer finds many adherents.

Those atheists who still hold on to that argument for dear life should ask if they are not using it as an excuse to live their life the way they want without a greater being telling them how to do it. God is not our personal errand boy who is there at our beck and call to fulfill every hedonistic desire we have.

Certainly there have been many horrible instances of the misuse of human freedom in history where we cannot help but ask God why these atrocities were permitted. As the grandson of genocide survivors, I am very sensitive to these anguished outcries.

But what about all the good there is in the world? Have we become so spoiled that we demand as an entitlement that everything in our life go smoothly without any adversity or opposition?

We who live in the year 2013 in comfortable North America rarely consider how privileged we are, not only in relation to the rest of the present world, but in relation to all those persons who have ever lived in history. Think about all the modern conveniences that we take for granted. We can visit friends who live 60 miles away in one hour by car, relatives who live 3000 miles away in five hours by plane. We can engage in a conversation with anyone, literally, in the world instantly by telephone, facebook, or email. In seconds we can download any of over 1,000,000 books on a Kindle and any of over 25,000 films on our computer monitor, not including foreign films.

I am not saying any of the above to mitigate the horror of the Boston Marathon bombings. The pain of the families who lost loved ones is real, as is the suffering of those who were injured. But I think that we who live in prosperous communities in North America expect that we should be immune from such catastrophic incidents. Such terrible incidents are for people who live in Damascus, Baghdad, or Kabul, but not for us

decent, stalwart Yankees.

And so, if we must ask, “Where was God during the Boston Marathon bombings?” the answer is “Right there!” God was right there in all the civilians who were running *toward*, not *away*, from their fellow civilians who were injured to offer them help. God was right there in the first responders and police officers who were rushing within seconds of the first blast to aid the screaming victims. God was right there in the rescue workers and medical personnel who quickly transported the severely wounded to 27 local hospitals. God was right there in the relentless manhunt of the thousands of law enforcement personnel as they diligently searched the neighborhoods of Watertown, capturing the surviving brother, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, in only about 18 hours after their initial shootout with the two brothers.

Yes, this calamity was absolutely appalling. But it could have been much worse. God was right there in the midst of the pain and the screaming and the dread offering courage, strength, and hope. And, yes, I think that God was right there crying with those who lost loved ones, who lost limbs, and whose lives will never be the same again.

God was right there moment by moment because God was never away.

God is always present with us, through horrific times and through ecstatic times. God is right there in tornadoes (see Job 38:1), when sparrows die (see Matthew 10:29), and, yes, when municipal disasters occur (see Amos 3:6).

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Gary



MAY BIRTHDAYS

- 5 Harry Manoogian
- 13 John Belanger
- 14 Emily Smith
- 18 Francis Spear
- 22 Mary Lou Brown
- 22 Paul Lavalley
- 22 Rev. Selena Reyes



Yes, “thank you” to the Sunday School for purchasing the lovely new white cabinet that sits in the narthex of the chapel. The cabinet now holds all of the Acolyte robes, nicely labeled for each particular child as well as the candle lighters. “Thank you” to John Belanger for picking up the cabinet from Lowe’s (and it was heavy!!) and “thank you” to Miss Dee for selecting and assembling the new piece.

AND, while on the subject of “thanks” . . .

“Thank you” to all who helped to make the Sunday School’s COOKIE WALK on April 7 and SPAGHETTI SUPPER on April 13 tremendous successes! Fellowship and profits were GREAT!!

THANK YOU PARK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

. . . *“Dear Pastor Gary and Linda,
Words cannot express our gratitude for you and all the members of your parish! You have become an important part in the lives of our residents, one life at a time!”*

*With much appreciation,
Bea Fontaine, Activities Director
and all the Staff of the Odd Fellows Home*

. . . *“Dear Miss Holly, Miss Linda and Park Church Youth Group,
I do believe in miracles, for my surgery and recovery were watched over by God’s angels. Your cards, thoughts and prayers helped in delivering this miracle.”*

*Gratefully,
Kate Wells*

OUR SYMPATHIES AS A CONGREGATION ARE EXTENDED TO BRUCE WELLS, WHOSE SISTER, JUDY MOBERG, PASSED AWAY ON APRIL 20, AND KATHI ROSE, WHOSE BROTHER, STEVE INMAN, PASSED AWAY ON APRIL 23. May God provide comfort to them during this time of sadness.

PLEASE SEND IN YOUR OFFERING FOR THE ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED

THE CHILDREN'S TOWER



Dear Children,

This month, Miss Linda has given up her "space." Was I speechless? Miss Linda?? Speechless?? When asked in school to write about a favorite building, our **Miss Jessica Baronas** had the following to say . . . which actually left Miss Linda SPEECHLESS!!

Perfect for all ages
Always here for me
Readings there are always right
Kind and joyful members

Children's chorus is every Tuesday
Open a Bible to follow the scriptures
Nice place to pray for loved ones
Going to church is my favorite part of a Sunday
Rare collection of nice boys and girls
Easter and Christmas cantatas are amazing
Great sales on cookies and bread
A lot of people come every Sunday
The first "Children's Church"
Incredible dedication
Open to everyone
Now it's over 100 years old
Any day can bring a new adventure
Lots of love here

Christmas is my favorite holy day
Hopeful for new members
Understanding God is the main priority
Reconciliation is one of the things we do here
Christians go to this church
How could I ever leave this when I get older?!



On the morning of Sunday, April 21st, our Youth Group along with Miss Holly visited the Odd Fellows Home. Certainly, our youth are not strangers to the residents at the Odd Fellows as they regularly go with Pastor Gary for Park's monthly service with Holy Communion. However, this visit was different in that it was one of a lighter nature, as the youth shared one on one time with the residents and had the opportunity to play games and share laughter with the elderly folk. Bless you, young people, for sharing a *youthful* morning with your *elderly* friends!!



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