

**“Remember. Rebuild”**  
**Rev. Dr. Robert M. Zanicky**

**September 11, 2011**

**First Presbyterian Church  
Wilkes-Barre, PA  
Psalm 29  
Nehemiah 2:9-10**

Ten years ago, as the inferno raged in both Towers, a man, a singular human being stayed behind on a high floor. He stayed with his friend who was in a wheel chair. Hundreds of firefighters, police, rescuers – human beings - spouses, parents, loved ones, neighbors – instead of running away from the inferno – ran into the fire to try and save the lives of strangers. But, those brave souls knew, that those inside were of great value. They were also spouses, parents, loved ones, neighbors. There were someone’s son or daughter. And they needed help!

There are some things worthy of risking our lives for. These heroes, and those murdered, almost 3,000 innocent men and women – are being remembered today – 10 years after the unwarranted, vicious, ungodly attack on our American soil, and Civilization! We pause to remember – to mourn and to build – rebuild our lives! To protect and plan for our and our children’s and grandchildren’s future!

For those of us living in the Wyoming Valley, these past several days have jarred our memories back to 1972 – the Agnes flood. We have lived through another flood of epic proportions.

How these words from the Times Leader, referring to West Pittston and Duryea, shock the sensibilities of many who lived in the valley in 1972, and all of us; “Flood damaged furniture and mud-soaked belongings piled up in front of many homes. Residents scraped off their driveways and paths using shovels. Basements were pumped out.”

The levee system here in the Wyoming Valley, has withstood its greatest stress ever imagined! Forty two point sixty six feet! It took its lumps – especially near the soccer fields in Forty Fort. And we had our additional scare at this site of the Market Street bridge. Forty two point sixty six feet! Over a foot and a half over the Agnes flood! Thank God for the levees and the human ability to protect ourselves! The flooding waters displaced over 100,000 people. Sixty five thousand were in Luzerne County. Many of our neighbors had gone to shelters.

Tragically, six deaths are attributed to this flood, one death from the West Pittston area. Pray for the families, in their grief and loss.

From my vantage; from new reports and coverage, I applaud our community and state officials for their professionalism, planning, implementing, and for their compassion – in this historic flooding. Also, the countless volunteers who have helped and who continue to assist – we owe a great debt of thanks! This is the Valley with a heart!

To those who sand bagged, those who helped at the multiple shelters, those who helped neighbors, those who rescued, the emergency responders, the police and fire officers. To the young fellows who came here Thursday early afternoon with my son Bob and Andy Gegaris and took out all the Bibles

and hymnals in the pews and moved them up to the balconies. They also moved certain chairs and other sundry items to the second floor, and last evening returned the books and furniture. How the Christian ethos permeates our culture especially in times of crisis. I'll grant, that many do not even think of these and other acts of kindness as Christian derived – but they are wrong. More about this – at a later date.

Heroes among us, many risking their lives to protect neighbors, communities! Already, cleanup has begun. Homes, businesses, churches, and more are either clearing away debris or planning on how to restore what has been flooded. In one way or another – the citizens of the Valley, the States of Pa, and New York – will rebuild! It's in our genes. It is in our God given DNA – of moving forward, in faith and hope. Those with faith always carry a vision! A vision to create, a vision to rebuild!

Although it has taken a long time – the World Trade Center is being rebuilt. Today, the “National September 11 Memorial” – twin reflecting pools that sit within the footprints of the Twin Towers, and feature bronze panels on which the names of the dead are inscribed, opens to the public. We remember, in New York, at the Pentagon, in Shanksville, PA, in Wilkes-Barre, next Sunday evening, and in thousands of other venues throughout our exceptional nation – the terrorist evil, the heroes, the innocent murdered. And we never acquiesce to this evil, but we rebuild – physically, morally and spiritually!

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg days ago stated; “As we reflect back on the past, let us remember not only the agony and anguish of the attacks but how we channeled our pain into something positive and powerful,” “Let us remember not only how the towers fell, but how we rose up – determined to defend our freedoms.”

A powerful “Amen!” to Mayor Bloomberg! I hope he won't mind a bit of prayer language on this day of remembrance and rebuilding.

As we rebuild and protect our culture, which witnesses to the value, integrity, and worth of all people, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani recently shared; “9/11 is not part of our history. It is part of our present, if we put it behind us, it isn't going to do any good because the Islamic terrorist extremists have not put it behind us, and they are still intent on attacking us.”

We must remember!

In remembering, how about the planned height of the rebuilt World Trade Center? It will be the tallest and strongest building in the United States. It will rise to the height of 1776 feet. Does that stir your memory? I'm sure it does! Architect, Daniel Libeskind for the World Trade Center, declares; “1776 is not just a clever number, it's a date. That's the date that declared that all people have full human rights, not just Americans, everybody in the world deserves rights, justice.”

So derived from our culture and faith.

Remembering and rebuilding are not new concepts. By no means. They are ancient. The wisdom of the book of Nehemiah – from generation to generation refreshes, and encourages the human spirit.

Almost 2,500 years ago Nehemiah remembered and from his remembering he changed the course of his people, his nation, and the world.

For far too long his people, the Jews had been under the thumb of foreign powers. A hundred years plus, before Nehemiah, Jerusalem had been terrorized, its high walls burned to the ground. Its elite, had been either murdered or deported away from their home.

Nehemiah, in exile, hears that his beloved Jerusalem is in ruins. The walls fallen. “When I heard these words I sat down and wept.” Words so similar to the cry of exile and anguish in Psalm 137. “By the waters of Babylon. There we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion...”

I remember 10 years ago the New Yorker featured a poem entitled, “When the Towers Fell.” At one point we read, “...and I sat down by the waters of the Hudson...” This poet knows something of the Bible and of its horror of exile and death.

This was exile, destruction! Zion was Jerusalem! And they saw its fiery collapse and were torn from her.

Nehemiah, still under foreign rule, but “better” dictators than the Babylonians – requests of the Persian ruler to allow him to return to Jerusalem and rebuild his city. He is allowed to go and do so.

Throughout, Nehemiah’s book the people are told to remember!

Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem. By night he secretly studies the demolished walls. This was dangerous business. Some did not want any rebuilding. They did not want to lose power. But when Nehemiah had seen enough, through his tear strained eyes, he gathered the people together and cried out to them; “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come let us build the wall of Jerusalem...”

And the people responded: “Let us rise up and build.”

We do not remember to freeze us into the past. We remember to thrust us into the future!

Whether it be a flood, or a terrorist attack, our faith heralds;

“The Lord sits enthroned over the flood...” and it is in our God given nature, with the guidance of Christ’s life, death and resurrection, To hold onto your vision, and to rise up and build!

Amen.