

The Blessing of Rebuilding Our Temple **Pastor Laura Hehner**

So... WOW. Last week!

What a mess! Literally!

The morning I was getting ready to leave for New Jersey,

I came over here to leave a casual little note in a congregant's box

In my rush to finish getting ready for the trip,

I go running down the stairs to place it in.

I remember glancing up from the note and seeing a little sparkle against the tile,

and thinking, "Wow. Bib must be doing a really great job in here!"

Then my feet start dragging. And making this strange splashing sound with each step.

Flooded. The sanctuary floor was a pool of water standing a good two inches deep!

Almost all the way up to the altar!

Surge protectors with chords plugged in were submerged.

Our extension chords from the ceiling were hanging INTO the water.

I did a quick circuit through the rest of the building,

Outside, water was running *through* the electrical box!

[explanation: calling Kim]

Thank God Kim answered the phone.

And God bless her, even though she was still sick, and Nikki was home sick, too

They both came barreling over to the church.

All of us rolled straight out of bed, basically--- just staring at the edge of the pooling water.

Janet later put all of her day stuff aside to join us,

and get all of our insurance stuff sorted out.

We're so blessed to have both of them.

'Cause folks, I'll tell ya, it was CRAZY in here.

Our church home. This house of God flooded, *then* nearly caught fire.

If that congregant hadn't asked for that book recommendation,

I don't know what would've happened to this place.

All of our wiring was coated in water and ice...

...Our electrical box at risk of blowing, according to the plumber

We came very close to a church-o-calypse, to put it lightly.

... All of this, of course, while I was packing to leave outta town
and see my grandma for her 100th birthday.

I have to say, God's been making it pretty clear for me over the past couple weeks,

Just how much life changes as we keep going.

As we keep moving through the days.

Life moves inside and around us, and through us, and ahead of us,

And I believe, it even continues moving behind us,

In memory, and shared experience that continues forming who we are today and tomorrow...

... In each of those movements, lifting us and carrying us to different places,

As different people.

Sort of just dropping us off in new moments here and there,

which continue shaping us into who we are.

And continue giving us new sight into ourselves.

All of these ups and downs... It's hard to know what to make of em, right?

We want to dislike the downs and love the ups.

The church flooding and nearly catching fire on the way out of town---

---well, that seemed like an obvious DOWN, right?

But the longer we're around...

... at least this has been my experience of it, anyway...

... as awkward and painful, and terrible, and horrible as some of the breakdown moments are...

As stressful, and hair-tearing, and humiliating

those crumbling moments sometimes feel...

... after you go through enough of the more casual ones...

...and even some of the terrible ones...

... you start realizing those moments we wish we could erase

from our minds and our hearts— like they never happened---

...well, they're the ones that wind up molding us the most clearly into who we'll become.

...forming the tougher, more sincere, stronger parts of who we are.

The best parts of who we are.

Those more energy-sapping minutes to remember, being the ones that give us

the strength and ability to continue on in the world.

It's an old thought... but definitely interesting, when you think about it, isn't it?

And all of it makes me think a lot about God.

And what exactly God planned in having life be this way.

In this strange little pocket of the universe we right now occupy,

Wow... God was being weird with this one, right?

We'll only be here like this for a little while.

This is just one small piece of God's soul, that we occupy right now.

And I believe there's an eternity of other places we'll see

and be a part of after we leave this piece of life behind us.

But we're here, right now.

And I wonder about this way of life a lot.

This strange balance between the good and the bad.

This seemingly unnecessary *bad* stuff so often so paradoxically bringing *good*,
much *needed* change.

...I wonder about this fact of destruction and resurrection in our *own* lives.

It seems in the life of Christ,

... God showed us the truth of our individual lives.

...A series of tearing down and building back up.

In Jesus' own experiences, and the experiences of the people around him---

---a rising above the rubble into something new and beautiful.

Because after all... this idea of rebirth...

...this idea of dying to yourself. Again and again.

Of seeing your old self destroyed,

only to rise anew into something entirely other than what you used to be.

IS the New Testament.

It IS the gospels, and one of the loudest messages of Jesus' life.

A continuously-coming reformation of our life and spirit, in the heart of God.

And the promise of a future... continuing on in God

in this cycle of change through the span of eternity,

Is the hope of God given to us through the gospels.

As we shoot our arrows and miss the mark....

Like we talked about a couple weeks ago, about sin---our mistakes.

As random bad circumstances come and go...

Life changes us. Life moves us to places we never thought we'd see.

Life—God---turns us into people we never thought we'd be.

Often through the destruction of our temples--- of ourselves---

And the blessing of building anew in a reorganization---a refreshment---

---a resurrection of the spirit inside of us underlying all of the rubble.

The blessing of being *born again* to life, within the warmth and love of God.

That is our understanding as Christian people.

Our reading from the Hebrew Bible speaks of this process of life

changing and rebuilding after destruction over and over.

But if you open up the gospels or New Testament as whole,

you'll find this message in a glance.

I included two, today, from John and from 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 5: 17&18...

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled himself through Christ...

John 2: 19-22...

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

I'll tell ya, when I splashed through the water downstairs last week,

and saw all of the ways our temple, here, had been destroyed.

Something different happened in me...

...something that's never happened before.

After the shock of first seeing this place we love so much in shambles,

My first thought wasn't certain doom, as it normally would've been.

I found myself starting to wonder about the changes that would be coming for us,

as a result of what had happened.

I imagined we'd be getting new carpet, at least.

I thought of how nice it would look, and how good it might smell.

Kim and I celebrated the fact that she'd no longer have to risk her life

tripping over that edge of raised tile, every Sunday.

I wondered if we might be forced from the building for a period of weeks.

In the past, that thought would've made me ridiculously tense!

But in that moment, I wondered, if we were forced from this place,

that maybe we'd need to meet in a high school cafeteria for a little while,

And that meeting there might introduce us to a new outreach we wouldn't have had, before,

Exposing our congregation to lives that otherwise wouldn't have overlapped.

The strange thing was,

My mind didn't go to thinking God had laid some kind of wrathful curse out for our congregation,

But a blessing.

I found myself thankful.

God knows, what happened... it could've been so much worse.

I believe---just like in our own resurrection--- God saved this temple from being completely annihilated.

Could've caught aflame and been just completely gone.

But instead, here we are, standing in all of the pieces. With a chance to rebuild.

And continue on together in the spirit and love of God, together.

Changing, and becoming something fresher and newer each day.

And I realized as I focused on this resurrection, rather than fear that just in doing that,

I had been destroyed and rebuilt from something I once was, too.

...In focusing on the resurrection that comes after the destruction,
even in the midst of those scattered pieces, I somehow didn't feel nervousness,
or despair, or pain...
... but hope.

And that's a beautiful thing to hold in your heart.

That's a gift from God.

God's shown me the presence of this gift in our world, a lot through these past couple weeks.

As I watched my grandma lean over and blow out the candles on her 100th birthday cake.

I felt it.

I thought of all of the life she'd seen. All of the change she'd felt.

The horrible moments, and the breathtaking moments.

The vastness of it... it was overwhelming.

She was born less than a year after the Titanic sunk,

And now she sits at the table while people press their fingertips into iphones.

All of the breaking down and rebuilding she must have done,

through all of those different days. All of those hours.

And knowing that same life lived in me. Lives in all of us.

The life God's given our souls.

Thinking about all of that resurrection and rebuilding in her soul...

...I didn't envy, her. But I admired her.

Because without an argument, I knew for her to make it this far,

she lived the new life of the gospels.

...While we rebuild this sanctuary here, and while we rebuild again and again

the temple of our own lives...

The bad stuff, don't let it bury you.

Let it break you down, and let it build you back up.

Don't let it make you feel lost in ruin.

Let it give you the scattered pieces you need to build yourself into something fresh.

Something strong. Something new.

...As someone *proud* of where you've been and where you'll go.

No matter what you see along the way.

Knowing that no matter where we are, or who we are, in any given moment,

we are blessed *forever* to find our temple destroyed and rebuilt always

inside the heart of God.

And there is nowhere more beautiful we can ever be.

Amen.