TO SUGGEST A STORY
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Religion

C4

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CAMILLE JOSEY
GUEST COLUMNIST

Absolute Infinitives!

Last week a towering figure in Old Testament scholarship died, Dr. Walter Brueggemann. I do not remember sitting through a lecture of Dr. Brueggemann's which did not end with his shirt soaking wet. Teaching was a full-bodied experience for him — an indication of his love for God's word and his passion for his calling as a scholar and teacher.

This week I've listened again to a lecture series he delivered nearly 20 years ago on the heels of the 2008 financial crash. The scripture passage was focused on the wilderness experience of the Children of Israel and the gift of "[a land that] the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, if only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today. ... If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, 'The seventh year, the year of remission [a legal requirement that all debts be forgiven], is near,' and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land' (Deuteronomy 15.4-11)."

Dr. Brueggemann noted that, in the Hebrew language of this passage that commands us to care for the needy amongst us, there are five absolute infinitives — the only place in the Bible to have such a concentration of absolute infinitives. The purpose of the absolute infinitive is to express intensity, to underscore the certainty of action.

In other words, caring for those in need is not optional. "Give liberally and ungrudgingly..." This is serious business. Dr. Brueggemann observes that the "human propensity toward hard-heartedness [do you remember who else's heart was hardened in this narrative? Pharaoh!] is countered in the YahWeh tradition by this memory — that this economy with neighborhood is not just a good liberal or social activist idea. It is the intention of the God of the Exodus."

Why?

"Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today (Deuteronomy 15:15, NRSV)."

This refrain, the command to remember that they were once slaves is repeated again and again throughout Deuteronomy (i.e. 16.12, 24.18, 24.22...) and beyond.

See **JOSEY**, C5

Local minister curates museum to share legacy, history

By Mo Burge
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Bishop Norris Allen of New Hope Cathedral Church of God has broken many a barrier in his 80-plus years. He credits his faith and his mother with putting him on the path to a life of dedication to ministry and civil rights.

To understand where it all began, it's important to put into context how he recognized his calling.

"The year was 1944 and I was 2 years old," Norris said.

He and his mother were out walking when a car hurtled dangerously close. What happened next has been a lifelong message in how Allen approaches life.

"She jerked me out of the path of the car and slammed her hand on the hood and simply said, 'Excuse me,'" he said, recalling how his mother rescued him from certain death. "Jesus and my mama saved my life."

The phrase "excuse me" has been the motivating factor, Allen said, in how he focuses on living a life of purpose. It is the title of his books, which detail his experiences and his mission to break barriers and inspire others to do the same.

Allen went on to live an extraordinary life as an advocate, minister and author. His goal is to not only set an example, but teach the next generation of leaders, he said.

Dozens of awards and recognitions pay tribute to his dedication to his faith, his family and his community. It is all for the greater good, he said.

And that means sharing his own personal history, which includes participating in protests and rallies and meeting former presidents, senators and giants in the Civil Rights Movement. He is now in a season where he is dedicating himself to documenting and sharing with others the history of African Americans both locally and across the country.

He has carefully documented this history in a private museum filled with photos, books, newspaper articles and artifacts that tell an important story. Allen said his entire collection is approximately 10,000 pieces.

"When people come to this museum, they won't go out the same," he said during a recent tour. "When you're looking at this, you're looking at my legacy."

Mo Burge

Bishop Norris Allen explains an artistic piece he created to demonstrate how his mother saved his life from an erratic driver when he was 2 years old.

Mo Burge

Camp One Cirron is the site of a private museum curated by local pastor Bishop Norris Allen. Free tours are available by calling 706-547-8369.

See **MUSEUM**, C5

Vital Grace marks milestone with 50th patient

By Mo Burge
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When the Rev. Kevin Brown was given a vision to help those battling cancer, the pastor of Bryant Chapel Baptist Church in Rome never envisioned just how important his efforts would be.

Brown started Vital Grace in Lindale in 2015 as a community health center focused on serving people with long-term illness, including cancer and chronic conditions.

He said Vital Grace was "divinely inspired" by his grandmother, who experienced hair loss through her own cancer treatment. It features two salons and makeover rooms for high-quality, medical-grade wigs and mastectomy bras "in a therapeutic environment that fosters love and acceptance," he said.

The nonprofit reached a milestone this month, serving its 50th patient with a custom-made wig.

"It's truly a blessing to know we've had this type of life-changing thing possible," Brown said as he presented Sarah Curl of Rome with a gift basket to mark the occasion Tuesday. "The impact on people in the community has been amazing."

Curl, who is still undergoing treatment, said it has been an interesting process of being pampered by the services and there are a wide range of emotions as she tries to get through each day.

Brown called it "mind-blowing" that 50 women have had hair transformations, including an 11-year-old, and the prayer is to help even more.

Mo Burge

Vital Grace, founded by local pastor Rev. Kevin Brown, marked a milestone with its 50th patient, Sarah Curl, receiving a custom made wig.

The service is available to all ages and both women and men.

From counseling and educational programs to community health fairs and networking events, Brown said the nonprofit is dedicated to equipping individuals with the tools, knowledge and emotional support necessary to navigate the challenges they face.

Stylist Pam Robinson said seeing the positive impact on Curl and others who have been transformed with the wig installations is why she gladly provides her services.

"Getting to see the smiles on their faces makes it all worth it," Robinson said.

Basketball star becomes a Buddhist monk

By Adnkronos International
Rome

Victor Wembanyama becomes ... a monk? The French basketball player, NBA star with the San Antonio Spurs and elected 'rookie of the year' last season, has decided to temporarily retire to a Buddhist monastery after a trip to China.

The player's sensational decision is shaking the United States and beyond, with photos depicting 'Wemby' in a robe and with a shaved head making their way around the internet.

The 21-year-old, one of the rising stars of world basketball and cover man of the American league, decided to stop for at least 10 days in a Buddhist monastery in Henan province, China, after he was struck by venous thrombosis in his shoulder in February, which compromised his season.

Wembanyama was impressed by Buddhist monastic life, so much so that he postponed the return to the United States of the members of his staff who accompanied him on this trip to China and decided to stay in the temple, built over 1500 years ago and known for discipline, the search for inner peace and the teaching of kung fu.

It is difficult to say whether Wembanyama will return to the United States after the 10 days agreed with the Spurs, who hope, like all their fans, to embrace their star again soon.

DECK CHEATHAM
GUEST COLUMNIST

Unmade beds

If we are to become God's children, we are to be undone. The undoing challenges our nature. Humans deceive themselves. What we perceive as normal is imperceptible to us because it is normal. But normal is the great deceiver on the path that is a new life in Christ.

Having been claimed by Christ, the new life plants the taking on and composts the undoing. In the world of habits and behaviors, a person finds that the best means to rid himself of a bad habit is to, through time, replace it with a good one. But this suggests our doing and undoing is something of our own will. God welcomes this effort, but His is another way.

What was once desirable to you in the old life, those desires forming those habits, will become undesirable living in Christ. The luster of the old life fades, sometimes slowly, sometimes instantly. God does this. We don't. The prism by which you see and judge, formed by culture, experience and belief, finds in the light of God's truth the god it serves.

If God is creator, He also purges. The awakening we experience reveals those gods in life to which we have before been attached and served. God does this. We don't. What was once thought of as a gift we possessed becomes known to us as the sin it is. God does this. We don't. The person you thought yourself to be, the one the world wanted you to be, gives way to the person God created you to be. Through God's grace, a courage unknown to you appears and you step up and greet that person, once a worldly creature, the one who is now a spiritual being living a worldly existence.

We have a part in this, willing to make ourselves vulnerable enough to see and hear what God is showing and telling us. A part that demands a palpable honesty at the altar of God's presence and His present. God remains in front of us, waiting for us to come and be in that present moment.

To paraphrase Ronald Gregor Smith, faith is a meeting, not trust in the world of objects that have their life in the past. Neither is it a reliance on the "wholly other" God, but a meeting with God who is both Other and Present. If we stress His distance alone and do not claim His presence in our relationship with Him and others, we reduce Him to a "sub-human" situation, to take refuge in a paradox of "the impassibility of the gulf between God and men."

Our lives are unmade beds. A life in Christ is the pulling up and tightening of the sheets, hospital corners tucked in, the even covering of the bedspread, the fluffing of the pillows made presentable. The bed does not make itself. The owner of the house does this because He knows the outcome He envisions. You are wonderfully made.

Deck Cheatham has been a golf professional for more than 40 years. A longtime Northwest Georgia resident, he now lives with his family in Monteagle, Tenn. Contact him at pgadeacon@gmail.com.