“WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT…”
MATTHEW 25:23 (KJV)

Rev. Jerald Clay Womack
Associate Pastor
First United Methodist Church Garland
Appointed 1978-1983
Appointed 1996-2017
Retired July 2017
Tornado survivors often compare the sound to that of an approaching freight train.

Which in this case was sadly appropriate for one couple recently relocated from Seattle and in the process of building a retirement home in tiny Fruitvale.

Their property is bordered by U.S. Highway 80 and the Missouri Pacific Railroad. They had plans to build their own miniature railway for local children to ride around the property.

And strewn throughout the rubble of what little they have left from the tornadoes that ravaged Van Zandt County on Saturday, April 29, the clean-up crew found several model locomotives and pieces of track.

Thankfully, the couple survived, with only one requiring hospitalization.

But the now bare concrete slab that formed the foundation for their home stands in stark reminder of nature’s power on that frightening evening.

“Sometimes we don’t realize just how blessed we’ve been,” said Darlene Sutton, one of six hardy souls from First United Methodist Garland who participated in the clean-up on Monday, May 8.

“Until we’re faced with utter and total devastation that has suddenly swooped in to demolish the dreams of someone we don’t even know … made manifest before our very eyes.”

For most of us, this was a rude introduction to what is normally a quiet, sleepy little town.

“I regularly pass through Fruitvale on the way to my favorite spot in East Texas,” Darlene said, “but I’ve never stopped. And I never would have if not for the opportunity to assist with the tornado clean-up.”

And what prompted Darlene, Darrell Lancaster, Cindy Wingo, Jack Culberson, Mark Buford and Associate Pastor Clay Womack to make the trip from First United Methodist Garland on this particular Monday?

Darrell may have expressed it best.

“I thought that in some small way the love of God could be expressed to those in the affected community by our presence and our willingness to help,” he said.

The rallying point for clean-up volunteers - where we and others received our assignments for the day - was First Baptist Church Fruitvale.

“I especially appreciated the send-off prayer at First Baptist, reminding us that we were there for God’s glory,” Darrell said. “And the appreciation shown by the locals coordinating the outside volunteers.”

Unfortunately, the welcome stood in stark contrast to what greeted us at the site we were assigned to clean-up, along with folks from Grace Avenue United Methodist Frisco, First United Methodist Fort Worth and others.

“We found precious little that was salvageable,” Darlene said.

“Perhaps the property was previously searched for personal items,” Darrell added, “but what I saw could easily have fit into a five-gallon bucket.

“It was sobering that such a relatively long time of living left such a small number of personal items after the rest were destroyed or left otherwise unusable.”
Holly Ingram
Lakeview Centennial
Daughter of Glynn and Kim Ingram, Holly plans to obtain a nursing degree from Tarleton State University. She wants to become a paramedic and to work in a hospital.

Her activities at Lakeview Centennial included gymnastics, law, sign language, bowling and SkillsUSA (skillsusa.org).

She was also an active participant in Pure Joy! Youth Choir and United Methodist Youth Fellowship (UMYF) at First United Methodist Garland, where she served as Youth Council President, Youth Chaplain and a ‘shepherd’ for Vacation Bible School.

Holly’s favorite church memory is of a mission trip to help with tornado clean-up in Joplin, Missouri.

“This had a strong impact on me,” she said, “especially the stories survivors told us about the butterflies.

“Any time they felt down and hopeless, a butterfly would come lift their spirits, and they knew it was surely a sign from God.

“And I got to experience the same thing after working all day in the hot summer sun, digging post holes for a fence.

“I felt so tired and disappointed at the slow progress we were making. About that time, along came a butterfly to lift all our spirits!”

Landon Jones
Garland High
Son of Carl and Kathleen Jones, Landon plans to attend the University of Texas at Dallas in preparation for law school and, ultimately, a long career as a lawyer.

At Garland High, he was in the orchestra and the jazz band, experiences he hopes to carry through his life by continuing to play the bass. He also played tennis and basketball.

Landon’s favorite memory was the first sermon he heard from Senior Pastor Valarie Englert.

“We were able to connect with what she was saying,” he said of his family, “and that’s what led us to want to join the church.”

Celeste Roberts
Sachse High

Not pictured:
Taylor Boyd
Garland High

Even with so much thrown in trash bags and so little left to show for their lives, “we began to know something about them,” Darlene said.

“They were creative people. He was a model railroader. She, I assume, was a crafter.

“I kept finding pieces of granite, broken up in small sizes, and odd assortments of mismatched silverware. Then I found a completed project. A dragonfly made of spoon parts and mounted on a piece of granite. A beautiful little sculpture of one of God’s most enchanting creatures.”

The day was long, tiring. Even frustrating.

“It looked like the debris from the house had been bulldozed into a row along with debris from the right-of-way,” Darrell described, “resulting in a pile of rubble, personal items, mud and brush. I think our job might have been more efficient and effective if the site had not first been bulldozed.”

And yet, everyone who gave of their time came away moved and blessed.

“One of the relatively rare personal items found seemed particularly appropriate for the circumstances,” Darrell said. “A DVD titled, as I remember, something like “God Song - For This Time and Place.”

“They will never know who came and went through the field in search of anything salvageable,” Darlene said. “But I will always feel blessed for having been there to do it.”
Welcome, New Members!

Confirmation Class of 2017
From left, Kylie Dudley, Ross Luna, Isaac Hilbun, Dean Ward, Lillian Holder