

Grand Commandery Knights Templar of New Jersey

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Rt. Em. Grand Commander

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As we enter the end of the harvest season, we should reflect upon the bounties provided by our Lord and give thanks. I offer to your attention this prayer for Thanksgiving Day, from the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Almighty and gracious Father, we give you thanks for the fruits of the earth in their season and for the labors of those who harvest them. Make us, we pray, faithful stewards of your great bounty, for the provision of our necessities and the relief of all who are in need, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who live and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Toward the end of October I was driving the Jersey Turnpike and Parkway from South Jersey to Union County. A construction vehicle ahead of me attracted my attention with a message lettered across the back. It said, "*We Exist, to Build Great Things.*" This sounded almost Masonic or even the motto of a Templar.

But what Great Things? Great highways, tall buildings, bridges, waterworks, churches, even stadia? Or perhaps artificial intelligence software, automatic driving vehicles, or space rockets? Consider new medical technologies to treat and relieve the sufferings of our fellow creatures? All seem worthwhile objects of our attention.

However, we as Freemasons and Templars are encouraged to direct our efforts to a nobler quest: to build that house, not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens."

During October one of our commanderies conducted a memorial for three Past Grand Commanders who had passed in the past twelve months. All were good men and it was an appropriate reminder. One, Herbert Wood, was a sergeant major, retired, U.S. Army, who once related to me an experience that was thought-provoking. He was undergoing surgery when his heart stopped beating and the surgeons were unable to restart it. He related that he had an out-of-body experience, ascended a very long, very bright tunnel and arrived at a place before a brilliantly it entity. Herb's description seemed very similar to that related by Moses in *Genesis* of his encounter with the Almighty at the burning bush.

He said that he was told that his work was not completed, and he was to return to the world. His heart spontaneously restarted, and he awoke. The experience changed his life.

Another Sir Knight, a past grand prelate and past grand chaplain, had a similar experience, related to me some years later. A member of the Marine Corps, he had been grievously injured in battle in Viet Nam, rescued from the battlefield, but his heart stopped while in a field hospital. He also had an out-of-body experience, ascended and encountered an entity that he described in the same terms as had Herb. He, too, was told that he was to return as his work was not yet done. Upon awakening and after a long recovery, he eventually became an ordained minister.

In several places in the Masonic ritual, we learn of returns at the bidding of the Almighty. In the Royal Arch, it is Zerubbabel who is instructed to return to Jerusalem to undertake the rebuilding of the Temple. At one point he must pass over a place of danger over a rickety bridge. In the 16th and 17th degrees of the Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite – Northern Masonic Jurisdiction, we see the instruction to Zerubbabel to make the journey. If one is a Knight Mason, again one experiences a bridge, encounters with brigands and dangers, in the return. The allegory and symbolism should be apparent.

We exist, to build great things.