

September 11, 2011
 Sermon for The Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost
 St Peter Lutheran Church
 Bowie, TX
 Larry Knobloch, Pastor
 Matthew 18:21-35

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Matthew 18:21-35 (ESV)

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. ²³ “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

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¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, Mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Its 102 minutes the world will never forget. That's how much time passed between the first plane crashing into the World Trade Center and the collapse of the second tower, on September 11, 2001, ten years ago today.

Most of us remember where we were when we heard or saw the events of that day. We still feel the shock and pain as we think back to that horrific morning—from people's initial bewilderment that a plane could slam into these skyscrapers on such a clear, sunny day, to the sudden, awful recognition that America was under attack. Many have said that society must never forget what happened on that September 11 as 2,603 lives were lost and countless other lives were changed in 102 minutes.

Yet today, on another September 11, we do not simply remember the evil at work in this world.

But that's what so many felt and thought of as the shock began to wear off. What now? Much like the person that is hit from behind, whips around ready to strike back, to FIGHT, our country went to war. From common people to pro football players, the military swelled with new recruits ready to strike back at evil.

On the home front, churches began to swell too, as people began to search for meaning and look for answers to the question why.

As the fever of war died down, 10 year later where are we? Our troops are still in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places around the world.

Several high profile terrorists have been captured or killed. Numerous follow-up attacks have been foiled by homeland security and our military, but otherwise life has pretty much returned to normal.

Although our troops are still in harm's way and the threat of terrorism is still high, our country is no longer on a war footing. There are calls of an unjust war that must stop. "Tell all" books are being written blaming everyone for everything. We have started to bend over backwards to be tolerant of every religion, EXCEPT Christianity. And now we complain about airport security when previously, we blamed airport security for not being strict enough.

Many Christians are left in the dust of the twin towers 10 years later, still wondering why. What good came from all of this?

Where was God when the planes struck the towers?

On anniversaries such as this, we get angry...no, we get mad! We get angry with the hijacking muslim pilots of that plane and the false religion that they follow. We don't like our neighbors because they aren't being respectful enough on this solemn day. And then we even get annoyed at those going overboard in observing 9/11. We get mad because everyone seems to have forgotten where the attacks came from in the first place as we have heard a litany of tolerance for all people and religions.

And finally, we still wonder, where was God! We get angry with Him. Surely, if God loved us, He would have done something. As I looked at the assigned Scripture reading for today a few weeks ago, I wondered, why it was that the Text was so full of forgiveness. How can I do on 9/11?

Last week, we had heavy LAW Text. That would have made for a great 9/11 Anniversary Text. But that was not God's will for today.

When I asked the choir to sing this particular sermon hymn for today, I was asked if I was sure, because it was the 10th Anniversary of 9/11, did this hymn really fit? It speaks of gifts, the gifts given by God. Shouldn't we be in mourning and contemplation?

But you see, although today, as a nation, we remember the many lives lost in 9/11, we as Christ's church, also remember God's grace and mercy.

10 years ago, so many cried out, "where is God". In a PBS special, religious "leaders", Christians included, went to lengths to take God to task. I remember watching in disgust as a pastor of another denomination, wearing his clerical collar no less, said that he could no longer believe in a God that could allow 9/11 happen. Satan had a field day. Possibly as many that came to church in the days after 9/11, just as many left the church as they followed satan's taunting words that God didn't love them and left them in the dust.

My friends, in the same answer I gave 10 years ago, I repeat today. Where was God on 9/11? He was right there with His children, just as He always has been. As we mourned for lost ones from each of the 4 planes, those killed and injured at each of the crash sites, God was welcoming the souls of the lost into heaven. All who called upon the name of Christ for their salvation, were brought home to eternal life. Just as Jesus promised the thief on the cross, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise", so that promise was fulfilled on 9/11, and every day since then.

This Includes Lois Stover who was a beneficiary of that same promise on Friday afternoon, as she listened to her Lord's call and went to her heavenly home. As she called upon the name of Christ as her Lord and Savior, so she was welcomed to her heavenly home. She had been bought and paid for by the blood of Christ.

I could have picked something else, so why did I stay with the assigned Text for this Sunday? Because it is so full of our forgiveness! All three readings speak to us today, as God's Word always does...if only we would listen to it.

Where was God on 9/11, not only was He bringing His children home, He was reaching out by the power of the Holy Spirit to comfort those left behind. Some listened; others hardened their hearts to His Word.

It is almost laughable, if it was not so tragic. When things are going well, we give credit to ourselves for being industrious workers. We have built marvelous wonders on this earth. But how many of the 7 wonders of the world have to do with the one true and Triune God? But rather, glory is given to nature or what man has done. We give credit to science for coming up with inventions and miraculous medicines that cure many ailments and diseases.

How many credit the intelligence that God has given them? We could go on and on...artists, athletes, doctors, but give credit to God? Heavens no, I did it!

But when a natural disaster strikes or a Hitler, or Bin Laden arise and kill hundreds, thousands or even millions and where does the blame go? Where was God when the Jews were marched into the gas chambers, where was God when the towers fell?

He was and is where He has always been, caring for and comforting His children!

The Holy Spirit comforted the world on 9/11 and continues to comfort us in His Word. He has far from abandoned us. He was with the wife and children who lost husband and father. With those who lost wives, grandparents, siblings and friends. And He is with you when you lose loved ones. He was with Lois' family as we prayed by her bedside and entrusted her to His care on Friday evening.

He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. (Joshua) He never has and He never will. Why? Because we are so good? God knows that truth...and you are not good enough to deserve His grace...but back to our Text...for the sake of Christ, who loves us and gave up His life for us, **you are forgiven.**

And we forgive others as we have been forgiven. Look to Genesis 50. As Joseph, who had been sold into slavery by his brothers, forgave them saying: *"you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."* God used the evil of Joseph's brothers for Good. He never left Joseph alone even though Joseph faced years of slavery, God had a plan. By God grace, Joseph was allowed to see it follow through. We don't always have that opportunity, but we have the witness of Joseph to help us trust that God always follows through, even in tragedies like 9/11. Some have already seen the fruition of God's grace as a brother or sister allowed the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts.

Romans calls us to welcome those weak in faith. Not to give them a good shake or to lord over them, but to act of behalf of the Holy Spirit to witness to them in actions and words. Again, we should forgive as we have been forgiven.

How many wonderful opportunities have there been to give witness to God's grace and forgiveness since 9/11? In all walks of life we witness in our actions.

One of the pictures I saw from relief workers in the recent fires I saw in the community of Bastrop, just about 30 miles from where I grew up, were stacks and stacks of bottled water. How much of a witness can a cool drink of water be to someone who has lost everything they had in a fire? A bottle of water, a hand on a shoulder, an opportunity to pray.

And finally, our Gospel. How often do we forgive our neighbor? Do you lay at home at night, thinking of ways to go out and kill muslims? Hopefully not. We will never forget what has happened, but rather than the anniversary of 9/11 being a day to spew hatred of muslims to the world, we honor the heroes, most of whom do not particularly want to be honored, and we remember those that were lost.

And we forgive.

Not once, or seven, buy seventy times seven. Seven is known as a perfect or complete number in the Bible, that means that we keep on forgiving. Can you witness or convert someone while holding a baseball bat over their head or a knife to their throat? Contrary to the thought of false religions active in the world today, you cannot. We forgive and that opens doors for the opportunity of God's Word to reach their hearts.

Just as Jesus forgave the people who called for His death, even as the precious lifeblood drained from His body, so too are we forgiven for His sake.

Our sins are no less. We are the ones who have left the foot of the cross again and again. Lifting ourselves up rather than Christ. We don't have any merit or worthiness of our own to even ask for forgiveness.

But we are called to repent and to ask...AND YOU ARE FORGIVEN!

As you call upon the name of Christ, you are indeed forgiven. The Gospel calls to you, Jesus died for your sins...you are a child of God, marked in baptism as one of His own.

That is why on this day of National remembrance, we can lift up our heads and praise God! He has and never will leave us nor forsake us. You are forgiven by the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. You are a child of God, forever and always.

In closing, I ask that you please pick up your bulletin, rise and read with me Psalm 46:1-2 as printed on the bulletin cover:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble...We will not fear.”

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria – To God Alone be the glory