

Commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of 9-11-01

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:13

Now these three remain, Faith, Hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.”

Theme: The Christian Response to the Evil of 9-11

When we think of the events of 10 years ago, there are many images that come to mind. We remember the horror as we watched the twin towers in flames and then the absolute shock as we watched them crumble. There were stories of tragic losses and of narrow escapes. There was heroism as people gave their lives for coworkers, and as a group of passengers on Flight 93 knew that they were giving their lives as they thwarted another attack on Washington DC. It was a time of extreme loss, but also a time when we came together as a nation.



There were several Memorial services which followed that horrible day. Within a few days there was a service at the national cathedral which might have been one of Billy Graham last great public sermons. There was a service at Yankee Stadium, which brought some controversy into our own synod. There was renewed patriotism in our nation. I remember being at the Monday Night Packer Game a few weeks later in which the national anthem was sung by Martina McBride and an American flag covered the entire field. Songs were written about the event. One of them that expressed our emotions at the time was “The Angry American” by Toby Keith. But the most striking event for me personally happened at a country music awards show about a month after the event. A singer named Alan Jackson sat on the stage with a guitar and sang a very simple song called, “Where were you, when the world stopped turning?” He would say that he was just writing down his thoughts and feelings of those events. The refrain of that song ends, **“Faith, hope, and love are some good things [God] gave us, and the greatest is love.”** I remember thinking that this is exactly the Christian response to such evil events in the world, with faith, hope, and love.

I. As Christians we responded to that event in faith.

Do you remember what we did that evening? We gathered in this place for prayer. It was the most amazing evening of my ministry. 100 people spontaneously gathered for prayer that night. We held another service a year later, which was also well attended. I remember that there were people who had not attended worship in years who had to come to worship that evening.

One of the greatest responses to that tragic event was to cling to our faith in God. We saw the greatest example of hatred and destruction, that most of us had ever witnessed in our lives. Those things drove us to the protecting arms of our Heavenly Father. We remembered the God who made everything good in the beginning. Even when we sinned and rebelled against His goodness, He still loved us so much, that He gave His own Son to redeem us from our sins. Every major service read from Romans 8, which assures us that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Jesus Christ our Lord. Despite the evil that encompassed the world that day, we trusted that God is faithful. He will

never leave us or forsake us. That is how God's people have always faced evil in this world. We face it in faith, that God will deliver us from evil, just as Jesus taught us to pray.

II. As Christians we responded to that event with hope.

Following the attacks, a massive operation was launched to clear the site and attempt to find any survivors amongst the rubble. On September 13 a worker named Frank Silecchia discovered a 20 foot cross of two steel beams amongst the debris of 6 World Trade Center. Mr. Silecchia would recall, **"I saw Calvary in the midst of all the wreckage, the disaster. It was a sign . . . that God didn't desert us."** 300 people attended a blessing of the cross. One teary-eyed firefighter said the cross helped him overcome his anger. **"We thought the devil was here, but with this cross, we know God is here,"** the firefighter said.

As Christians where do we find hope in the midst of such devastating events? It is in the cross of Christ. His cross gives us the sure hope of the forgiveness of all of our sins, the assurance that God is with us every step of this life, and the certainty of everlasting life with Him in heaven. The great things of this world might be destroyed. We will all eventually return to dust, but through it all we have hope in Christ. We know that our future is bright, no matter what happens to us today because Christ is our Savior. His cross is the assurance that there is hope, even in the most devastating experiences of life. Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

It's interesting that there is currently a big legal battle with regard to this cross that was a symbol of hope to so many people in the days right after 9-11. It is to be included in a museum to remember the events of that time. A group of atheists is suing to try to stop it from being included. It is still exactly as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God."* (1 Cor. 1:18) It is the cross of Christ that gave us hope that day and still gives us hope today.

III. As Christians we responded to that event with love.

There were so many great acts of love associated with that horrible day. There were the thousands of firefighters and policemen who entered the buildings as they were burning. 411 of them perished. There were many people who helped others to safety, who then perished themselves. Millions of people in our country lined up to give blood. Millions of dollars were given to charitable organizations. The Catholic priest, Father Brian Jordan, who blessed the cross that was found said of those days following 9-11, **"We saw evil at its worst, but goodness at its best,"** St. Paul's Episcopal Chapel, which was miraculously saved from destruction, became a relief center for those who worked in the rescue effort following 9-11. They were counseled, given meals, and treated for stiff muscles and burned feet. One of my favorite stories is of a woman in her 80's who heard that a worker had hurt his leg, so she got on the subway, and made it to the chapel. She gave the man her cane, and then hobbled back to the subway.

That is how we as Christians react whenever there is a disaster. Our Lord never loves us with words. His love always forces Him to love us with action. As John 3:16 says, *"God so loved the world, that He have His only Son."* In the same way, by God's grace we responded to that day with many deeds of love and kindness. In doing so we were agents of God's love to those who were suffering.

The evil of 10 years ago was intended to break us as a nation. By responding to it faith, hope, and love, those events have only made us stronger. Each generation has had its day of great tragedy. 150 years ago we were embroiled in the Civil War. About 100 years ago we experience World War I. Then came World War 2. Our tragedy was the 9-11 attacks and the 10 years of war which have followed. There are still so many troubling events in the world today, but when we cling to our Heavenly Father in faith, when we find hope in the cross of Christ, and when we love each other as God has loved us, we will see that God sees us through all the troubles and trials of this world, and He will bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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September 11, 2011*