

9/11-11<sup>1</sup>

Romans 8:31-39

<sup>31</sup>What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup>Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;  
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John 16:25-33

<sup>25</sup>“I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father. <sup>26</sup>On that day you will ask in my name. I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; <sup>27</sup>for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. <sup>28</sup>I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father.”

<sup>29</sup>His disciples said, “Yes, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure of speech! <sup>30</sup>Now we know that you know all things, and do not need to have anyone question you; by this we believe that you came from God.” <sup>31</sup>Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? <sup>32</sup>The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. <sup>33</sup>I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”

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Our country was previously attacked. It was a ruthless, vicious, hateful, brutal, coordinated attack on a military base in our country. Our president described it as a day that will live in infamy. On 9/11/2001 we saw the attack on color television sets, in real time.

- At 8:45 a.m. American Airlines Flight 11 carrying 92 people from Boston to Los Angeles crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center.

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was shaped by the reflections of James W. Moore in his book, 9/11, Dimensions for Living Press, Nashville, TN, 2002.

Police, firefighters and other first responders rushed to the site to rescue all they could and provide aid to those who were injured.

- At 9:03 a.m. United Airlines Flight 175 carrying 65 people from Boston to Los Angeles crashed into the south tower of the World Trade Center
- At 9:43 a.m. American Airlines Flight 77 carrying 64 people from Washington to Los Angeles crashed into the Pentagon
- At 10:03 a.m. United Airlines Flight 93 flying from Newark to San Francisco crashed into a field near Shanksville, PA
- At 10:05 a.m. the south tower of the World trade center collapsed
- At 10:28 a.m. the World Trade Center's north tower collapsed
- At 5:20 p.m. World Trade Center Building 7 collapsed

That day 2977 victims died along with 19 hijackers. 2606 from New York City were in the Twin Towers or on the ground. 125 at the Pentagon died, 55 of which were military personnel. And 411 emergency workers who responded gave their lives. In addition to Americans who were killed 236 citizens from more than 90 other countries also died.

Wherever we were and whomever we were with, the events of that day were a shock that left us stunned, filled with grief and fear. In the following days we were comforted by the expressions of solidarity throughout the world. At the changing of the guard in Buckingham Palace, the British band played our national anthem rather than theirs. People from the nations of the world brought flowers to our embassies and took part in candlelight vigils.

The pain of that experience lingers and was stirred up this week as we saw the replays of the events. One man wrote to me on Monday saying that thinking of the losses of all those families caused him to weep. Because of his grief he said "I will not be in worship on Sunday."

On 9/11/11 we gather as we gathered on the evening of the attack. Some of our questions have been answered: Who did this? Why? And how do we respond? In the intervening 10 years, we have been at war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thousands of soldiers from our country and other countries have died. We have had successes. Still, while Al Qaeda has been seriously wounded, they have not yet been defeated and their threat remains.

What sense are we to make of this as Christians? That will be our focus today.

Every Sunday, in each of our churches, we gather beneath the Cross. It is for us the symbol of the world's darkness, of the world's power to distort and destroy. In the words of that powerful spiritual

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Oh.....sometimes, it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

But the is also - and primarily – a symbol of God's persistent and reconciling love.

When engulfed in the darkness of Golgotha, Jesus was the light shining from the hill. In him God was reconciling the world with love and overcoming the world's darkness with light.

Whether we are under attack as a nation, as an economy, as a community, as families or as an individual we look to the Cross knowing that just as God raised Jesus to new life, so God will be present with us and see us through.

There are three affirmations that we may make.

Times of darkness are times of disorientation and fear. We cannot get our bearings and feel at risk. Challenging though such times are, the Apostle Paul pointed the way forward: "...we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord! That is a statement of faith.

After the funeral for a young woman her husband and little boy returned home and went to bed as soon as the sun set. The father could think of nothing else to do. As he lay in bed his grief came over him like the clouds of dust from the collapsing towers. His young son broke the silence with a soul piercing question, "Daddy, where is mommy? When is she coming back?" The father took the child back to bed and tried to calm him so that he could go to sleep. But, the little boy's grief would not let his mind rest. Eventually, the father took the boy to bed with him. He continued asking questions. In the darkness the little boy could not see his father so he reached out his little hand and asked, "Daddy, where is your face? Are you looking at me? If you are looking at me I think I can go to sleep." It wasn't long before the little boy was quiet and falling asleep. That's when the father spoke of his grief to his Father in heaven. His prayer was something like this: "God, the way is dark right now, and I don't see how I'll get through, but if you're looking at me, somehow...I think I'll make it".<sup>2</sup>

That is affirmation number one: *because God is with us we walk in faith and not in fear.*



The second affirmation concerns our way forward.

We have heard powerful stories of people being rescued before the towers fell. One such storey was of a man who was exiting the second tower when it was hit by the flight 97. Suddenly, the stairwell filled with smoke and he could not see. He was disoriented and frightened. Just then a policeman reached out his hand and touched his shoulder. The officer said, "Follow me. I know the way out."

That is the Christian gospel: Jesus is the One who knows the way out – to safety and to life. He is the one who can save us.

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<sup>2</sup> See James W. Moore, 9/11, p. 20

Acting in fear or panic often makes our situation worse. When we're under attack, we may walk in faith and not fear, in hope and not despair...our second affirmation.



As Jesus anticipated the darkness of his crucifixion, he spoke calmly to his disciples about the peace that is theirs. He said, "In the world you face persecution, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

The nature of his overcoming the world was, in a word, love. Jesus not only preached love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, he did it while nailed to the cross.

This may be the most challenging affirmation for us...

As we were filled with rage over this horrendous act of violence, we called out for justice. In a Frontline program earlier this week they reported that on the evening of 9/11 leaders of the CIA were formulating a plan that became our country's strategy for responding. Such planning happened not only in our country but around the world.

How do we normally respond when people join together and commit a terrible crime? We find them and make it impossible for them to do it again. That is justice. Our God is a God of justice. But God is not just defined just by justice. The one word that was used in the great commandments was also used in Jesus' command to his followers for their relationship and for their interactions with the world. That word was *love*. Our God is a god of justice and love.

So we must resist feeding opinions about whole groups of people or all the adherents of one faith. Making such generalizations distorts reality. Who here today would think justice is served if people assumed that all Christians were like Jim Jones where 918 people were killed. Or who among us as Americans would want to be described as a Timothy McVeigh?

There are extremists in every country and within every faith. Clearly, they have been carefully taught to hate, and that is not what Jesus did nor what he taught, not what he stood for and not what he died for.

Someone once said that "God does not speak from an easy chair; God speaks from the cross" and God's message from the cross is one of love, even for our enemies and those who persecute us. Protect us from them – yes! Keep them from doing it again or some new horrendous act – yes! But hate – not the followers of Jesus.



On 9/11 we lost our sense of security, we lost a symbol of our country's power, and many people lost precious family members and dear friends. With developing illnesses of the responders being discovered and taking their lives, we are, in some ways, still experiencing losses, but we need not lose our identity and our direction. We continue to affirm that "the Lord is my Shepherd" and pray "thy will be done". So we move forward even in times of darkness. Because God is with us

and will see us through any attack we need not give into fear, despair and hatred. Confident that God will see us through, we may walk in faith, hope and love.

Amen.

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