



**“Remembering and Forgiving”
13th Sunday after Pentecost
09.11.11**

The African-American spiritual, “were you there?” asks if we were present when Jesus was crucified. Today, the question is not ‘were you there’ as the spiritual asks, but rather, ‘where were you?’ on this day ten years ago. For many, the memory of where they were upon hearing news of the events of this day ten years ago remains a vivid memory. Others will read of this day years from now and wonder about the circumstances and events that changed not only how Americans viewed the world, but how the world viewed the United States of America.

This day carries with it a weight similar to other important and significant dates in American history. Regardless of whether it was World War I or World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iran, Iraq, or Afghanistan, many of you may remember where you were upon hearing news of America being at war. News of America being at war often carries with it a range of feelings, thoughts, and attitudes: from those who think war is not the answer to those who think violence is the only way to solve problems, and how quickly can they sign up to serve, protect, and defend our country .

This day also brings a wide range of attitudes, feelings, and thoughts in planning a worship service such as ours today. What readings do we use on this day? Should the readings from the lectionary be used and ignore the significance of September 11th completely? Are there other options more suitable for this day? Is today a day of remembering? A day of peace? A day of mourning? A day of penitence?

This day is all of these – and so much more. Today is a day of remembering. It is a day of peace. Today is a day of mourning. It is a day of penitence. More importantly, today is a day of coming together as a family of faith – to be strengthened, to be fed, and to share with one another our hopes, our dreams, our joys, our worries, our memories.

But, this day – just like that day ten years ago, is a day the Lord has made. Many who have been interviewed in the media over recent weeks remember the day being “a perfect early fall day”. While the Psalmist reminds us to rejoice in the day that has been made, it is hard, even ten years later to rejoice. It is as the hymn text proclaims in, “Lord Whose Love in Humble Service”: *still your children wander homeless; still the hungry cry for bread; still the captives long for freedom, still in grief we mourn our dead. As you, Lord, in deep compassion Healed the sick and freed the soul, By your Spirit send your power To our world to make it whole.*”

We gather, to remind ourselves not only of what we as a country have been through, but also, to remember that all the days of our lives our precious in the sight of the Lord. Bishop Roy Riley of the New Jersey Synod recently wrote about the events of 9/11/01:

“all the days of our lives – the best days and the worst days – are lived in God’s precious presence, because God chooses to be present and promises to be with us to the end of time. A cross that was lifted up on a hill outside of Jerusalem makes a cross that emerges from the ruins of the World Trade Center Towers mean something to us. We know that we and all those who lost their lives on 9/11/01 mean something to God, something very precious. This gospel holds us in common and bids us to hold one another in love and in mercy – the common good born out of a most uncommon, unfathomable grace.”

It is indeed grace that binds us together as family, as a community of faith. It is grace that finds us, rescues us, changes us, and daily offers the forgiveness of sins. It is grace that allows us to gather this morning to hear Peter’s question of Jesus: “Lord, how many times must I forgive?”

For Peter, and perhaps to us, it is a question that sounds simple. The reality is, extending forgiveness is often easier said than done. Sometimes the more difficult part is not the matter of offering forgiveness as to admitting that we are wrong and in need of one another’s forgiveness.

More than that, offering and seeking forgiveness is more than saying we are sorry. It is more than asking, ‘will you forgive me?’ Forgiveness is a matter of changing our hearts, our lives and placing them on the path God intends for us. It is a matter of daily needing to forgive the wrongs done to us. It is a matter of daily seeking the forgiveness of others. And, it is a matter of DAILY seeking God’s forgiveness in our lives.

When the Nickel Mines tragedy occurred five years ago, the world was stunned with the reality that those who were impacted offered forgiveness. On one level, we knew this was the correct thing to do. But on another level, it seemed so foreign, so strange to us that a community of faith would act in such a way as collectively saying, “we forgive you.”

And perhaps that is the lesson for us today: That forgiveness comes through God’s grace in ways we do not expect or anticipate. When we experience the forgiveness of God in our lives, our lives are changed – for the better.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable mercy in our lives, today, tomorrow, and always.

Amen.