

“Know and Remember”
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
17th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 19C) – 11 September 2016
Luke 12:4-7, 22-32

It was a Tuesday, and I remember walking into the fellowship hall for a cup of coffee when our Communications Director ran up to me and reported, “Someone just crashed an airplane into the World Trade Center.” Of course, I thought accident, or maybe pilot suicide, but as the morning unfolded, the truth emerged. A cruel assault, full of malice born of bigotry and ignorance, struck our nation, killing thousands.

I remember a sense of confusion and numb disbelief and fear, looking out my office window down Peachtree Road at the skyscrapers of Atlanta, where many of our parishioners worked. I remember feeling sad and outraged when I went home and looked at Stephanie, six months’ pregnant, and wondered, “What kind of world are we bringing our child into?” Months later, after gallant workers at Ground Zero had done all they could, I remember helping with a Burial Office for a young man whose family had nothing to bury.

What do you remember? I bet you know exactly when and where and how you got the news. The world just seemed to stop. Everything so important only a moment before – the sales call, the meeting, the errands, the test – none of that mattered much anymore. Even if we wanted to forget, even if we could, we need to remember, because out of that horrible darkness came light.

We saw humanity at its worst, but also at its noblest. Brave men and women risked and sacrificed their lives at the World Trade Center and at the Pentagon to rescue survivors. Passengers flying over Pennsylvania, informed of the plot by cell phone, decided that their plane

was not going to be used as a weapon. People rushed to give blood and to pray, filling churches and synagogues and mosques. People felt fear and also compassion.

But now, after fifteen years of unrelenting warfare, we wonder, “When will it stop?” We don’t know, and that’s disturbing, infuriating. We don’t know what the next target is, or how best to protect the people we love, or if that’s even possible. We can’t know, so we need to focus on what we do know. We need to remember and share the story of faith that gives us the power to abide and hope and endure.

Remember how Jesus encouraged his disciples? “Do not worry about your life. Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? Do not be afraid. Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more.” Jesus spoke those words to people who felt threatened. They faced strong opposition from a small but dedicated group that, secure in their self-righteousness, objected to the beliefs and the way of life Jesus taught. They stood ready to do whatever it took to keep him from spreading his message, including the use of force.

Of course, we know how that story ended, with Jesus dead on a cross, his enemies triumphant and gloating, his followers scattered, his cause lost, or at least that’s how they thought the story ended, but we know better, right? They knew enough to nail Jesus to the cross, but we know that there’s not enough iron in the world to keep Jesus in the grave.

That’s the crux of our story, the irrepressible life and love of God as revealed in Jesus, who showed how death is not the end, but a new beginning; how there’s hope for a Kingdom to come, a Kingdom of life everlasting, full of peace and joy. And this Kingdom isn’t just then and there. It’s here and now, alive and active in us, resisting sin and death, bringing order to chaos, witnessing a love that comforts and heals and never dies.

Remember how Paul supported the early Christians in Rome? They, too, suffered from persecution, because they chose a different path to follow, a path that made them strange and offensive in the sight of others. Paul insisted that they stay faithful, because the people who hated them meant nothing compared to the person who loved them.

“If God is for us, who is against us?” Good question, but what’s the good answer? Nobody. Paul kept the questions coming. “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” Good question. What’s the good answer? Nobody. Paul then reeled off a lengthy list of things people might imagine could tear them away from Jesus. He concluded that all of them proved powerless against God.

Of course, we know how that story ended, too, right? The Christians of Rome and, indeed, disciples across the Empire came under increasing suspicion and oppression. Some were dispossessed of their property and exiled, and they were the lucky ones. Some were tortured and killed, in the most horrific ways imaginable. Some ignored Paul’s pleas and renounced their faith, and the power of hate pushed the faith of Jesus into obscurity. Nobody practices it anymore. Nobody even knows about it, though some might look around this room and argue that’s not really how the story ended.

Remember the Psalm we sang? “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. It is he who makes war to cease in all the world; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear, and burns the shields with fire. ‘Be still, then, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.’” Did you know that the majority of the 150 Psalms in the Bible are Psalms of lament, the heartfelt cry of desperate people in deep trouble with nowhere else to turn? Psalm 46 isn’t one of them, obviously, but even in their lament, almost every single Psalm contains verses of praise for the promise of God’s grace.

Our ancestors knew that God would help – perhaps not precisely in the way they wanted, or on the timeline they preferred – but that God would help, somehow, someday. They knew, because they remembered their story of faith. We need to know that, too. We need to remember that, despite all evidence to the contrary, God works.

That can be hard to believe when we remember what happened on 9/11, what’s happened these past fifteen years, when we think ahead to an uncertain future. We wonder “where was God?” on that dreadful Tuesday, and that’s a fair question. It’s almost impossible to believe that our loving God wants such things to happen and hard to understand why he allows them to. I wish I could give you definitive answers, but the truth is we don’t know. Nobody does.

By faith, though, we do know that “God is our refuge and strength.” Think of how many times God has offered you protection and aid and guidance, and how many times God has inspired you to share those blessings of grace with others. It’s true that God has not yet ceased war in all the world, but we need to hope that somehow, someday, God will bring peace, and we experience a foretaste of that peace when we heed the Psalm and take time to “Be still, and know God.” In this world, that still silence is our refuge and strength.

In that silence, we remember our story. In that sacred silence, we know that the story of faith isn’t finished, that God’s still writing new chapters through us, but that the final pages have already been authored by Jesus on the cross and in the empty tomb. The Kingdom is already present, working out God’s purposes, often in subtle ways not easy to notice, and God’s kingdom will come in its fullness, a day to anticipate with hope and faith, a day to pray for in solemn silence. Amen.