

Sermon 091116 September 11  
Scripture 1Corinthians 13  
Sermon Title- September 11 Remembered

Welcome back to Sunday morning worship at Union Church. Our Wednesday evening worship and cookouts are great but Sunday morning worship is the way the world should work. Normally, I would be delivering my 'Rally Day' sermon talking about our plans for the program year. I'm saving that for next Sunday because of the significance of this day.

For those of us who are old enough to remember, fifteen years ago today is a day none of us will ever forget. It is one of those days that you remember where you were and what you were doing when you first heard the news.

For our young people, who do not remember the event, let me tell you what happened. The largest terror attack in world history was perpetrated on our country on September 11, 2001. Four large commercial planes carrying innocent people were hijacked. On suicide missions, terrorists took over the controls of the aircrafts and flew them into huge buildings full of people in New York City, the Pentagon where our military headquarters is, and another plane in which some passengers fought back against the terrorists crashed in a field in Pennsylvania.

Almost 3,000 people perished and over 6,000 were injured. Over \$10 Billion in property was lost and the overall cost is estimated of over \$30 Billion. The cost in terms of dollars is miniscule compared to the human loss and the effect on our country and the world.

East Bridgewater acquired a piece of steel from the wreckage of the twin towers that is now a memorial in the green by the town hall. Yesterday, there was a ceremony dedicating the memorial. I had the honor of giving the Invocation. Prior to my prayer, I introduced Sally White, the mother of Susan who perished in tower #2 in the attack.

The memorial is dedicated in part to East Bridgewater's own Craig Miller, who was an agent of the United States Secret Service. Craig was the epitome of a hero that day when he perished as he attempted to get people out of the twin towers. Craig's heroism on Sept 11 was only his last act. He had already been awarded two Bronze Stars for his service in Desert Storm in the early 1990's. His brother Brian spoke lovingly and proudly yesterday at the dedication.

For Sally and Brian and others who had a direct connection to someone who perished in the attack, the memory of that day is personal. What I'd like to talk about is what it was like for the rest of us that did not know anyone personally who perished or was injured.

For me personally, I felt gashed. I was confused, not believing it was happening, and frightened. At the time, I was in a large business

building in an American city. I didn't know if there were more attacks coming. I remember wondering why someone would do such a thing.

I'm going to use a swear word here so be prepared. The late great Tim Russert said on TV within an hour of the towers going down, "The bastards knew what they were doing." Leave it to me to think of this, but I thought of a line from Godfather Part II. Michael Corleone was in Havana, Cuba. He had just witnessed a suicide bomber during the Cuban revolution. He told the story at a birthday party for Hyman Roth. Roth asked him what the story meant to him. Michael said, "It means they can win." Of course the Cuban revolution was successful. That day, seeing the suicide attacks by the terrorists on our country made me think that they could win. Thank God they haven't.

Another thought I had was that the country and the world would never be the same. I was correct; it hasn't. I don't know what you did that evening but I was in church and the church was full. I remember the eloquent pastor getting up and saying that he didn't know what to say.

It was one emotion after another. It didn't take me long to get furious and wanting revenge. I admit to being very happy when Navy Seals found and killed Osama Bin Laden, the terrorist leader.

There is a wonderful theologian at my Seminary, BU School of Theology. Her name is Dr. Shelly Rambo. She studied trauma and its

effect on the human psyche and spirit. Dr. Rambo interviewed, among others, rape victims and combat veterans. She wrote a landmark book on the subject titled 'Trauma and Spirit.' Her book was well received in both Psychological circles and Theological circles. Among other important points that she made in the book is that once you experience trauma, you never fully recover from it. You can try to bury it or even deny it, but it is always still there and it changes you for the rest of your life.

I think that is what happened to our country that fateful day fifteen years ago. It was a national trauma that has changed how we see ourselves, how we see our country, and how we see the world. It has not been a positive change. It has made us more edgy, more suspicious, and given us all a darker view of the world. Add to it the Boston Marathon bombings, Chattanooga and others and we feel more vulnerable than we ever did.

The question is, as Americans and as Christians, how do we handle this? How do we live our lives according to American ideals and Christian values? How do we move forward so to enable our children and grandchildren to have full, rich, and meaningful lives?

I remember the patriotic fervor that overtook our country in the wake of the attacks. I remember what everyone kept repeating in that

time, 'If we don't continue living our lives as we have, the terrorists win.'

I think we have done that. I met Sally at a typical American backyard barbeque. The last time I checked, the Red Sox are still filling Fenway Park and the NE Patriots are still engendering love in six states and hate in the other 44. We are here this morning living out our constitutional right to worship as we please.

I think we have become more watchful, more alert, and more vigilant. Unfortunately, we have hate speak that raises fears and suspicion. Let me say again what I have said from this pulpit before. Muslims are not our enemy. Muslims do not hate us. The terrorists run contrary to every tenant and teaching of the Islamic religion. They do not deserve to call themselves Muslims. Their motivation is hate for America, period. I heard an American Muslim woman say on Facebook recently, "ISIS is to Islam what the KKK is to Christianity."

So how do we as American Christians live our lives in a world in which we are hated simply for being who we are? For me, the answer is simple. Love. In a world in which hate runs rampant, love is the only answer. You do not answer hate with hate; you answer hate with love.

Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors and love our enemies. That can be hard to do, but it is the answer. Yes, we can still be alert, watchful, and vigilant but loving and compassionate all the while. We

know that our love will not make hate in this world go away. We do know that it is the answer to hate.

We turn once again to The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr who, to say the least had much hate directed at him and his people. The last Christmas Eve of his life in 1967, he spoke these words in his sermon: "We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws and abide by the unjust system, because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good, and so throw us in jail and we will still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and drag us out on some wayside road and leave us half-dead as you beat us, and we will still love you. Send your propaganda agents around the country, and make it appear that we are not fit, culturally and otherwise, for integration, and we'll still love you. But be assured that we'll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom.

We will not only win freedom for ourselves; we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory."

AMEN