

“TOWER OF LOVE”

TEXT: Psalm 139:7-12; Romans 8:35-39

We've had better weeks. Last Sunday seems so far away, a distant memory of when we felt safe and happy. In this week when we were going to focus on the third part of the United Methodist advertising slogan...open doors...who could have known just how literally our church would be living that out. Virtually all week our doors have stood open for prayer and comfort, for services and vigils. And people have come.

All over the country people have turned to communities of faith, seeking comfort, seeking answers, seeking each other, seeking God. If I were writing an essay about Tuesday, I think I might title it “The Day Atheism Died,” because it seemed that, as much as people questioned how God could let something so terrible happen, there was a sudden realization of the need for something more. Many this week discovered the need to know that there is a tower somewhere that cannot crumble into dust...something that will endure when everything else is gone...something that will outlast even death. And so we turned to God.

But we did not turn without questions. “Where was God?” people asked. I'll tell you where God was. God was in the four planes, pleading with the hearts of the hijackers not to use their freedom in this way. God was in the passengers, filling their hearts with courage. God was keeping air-phone lines open so some could call with important information and, in the midst of hate, speak words of love to others. God was each person on each plane as they reached out to one another.

God was also in the buildings, urging people out. God was working in the lives of men and women who helped one another to find an exit and in those who brought strength and peace to each other as they realized the time for escape had passed.

God was working quickly on the ground. We watched God...now in the uniform of a firefighter, now in police garb, running into the building again and again to bring people to safety, urging those on the streets to keep running. God was right there, allowing the building to collapse upon him in the hopes of saving maybe one more.

God was gearing up in the hospitals to receive the wounded and in the morgues to weep and to give honor to the dead. God is digging through the rubble, even as we speak.

Wherever there was an act of courage or bravery or kindness or compassion, there was God, defying hatred with acts of love; showing that for every suicide pilot sacrificing a life for vengeance, there were hundreds upon hundreds who willingly gave their lives in acts of love and mercy.

As the World Trade towers fell, the tower of love grew strong. As the Pentagon burst into flame, the fire of God's love burned brighter still. That is where we place our hope. To hope in the things of this world is to invite disappointment and disaster. Our hope is not in the things of earth, but in the Lord who made heaven and earth. If the towers of our lives are to stand, they must be built not of steel, but of love.

The response of the Church to the terror of this week is the same as it has always been. "Look to the Cross and the empty tomb." Love is stronger than death. Love never ends. We are a resurrection people. No matter how grim the tower looks on Friday and Saturday, Easter will come, and a new tower will rise from the ashes. It will be back...in the flesh. Hatred can do horrible damage, but eventually it will be dust. Only love endures, and in the end love conquers all.

None of us can change what happened this week. But each of us will have a choice in how we will respond. Where will we place our hope? In what will we place our trust? In towers that are built to the sky and planes that fly through the heavens? In careers and business and money? When you are tempted to think that these things have meaning, remember the pictures from this week. Remember the towers collapsing into a pile of rubble. Earthly glory lasts but a moment and then is gone.

But the glory of God cannot be dimmed. Where should you place your trust? In the Spirit that soared as the Trade Towers fell, in the tower of love that stood tall while towers of steel buckled. Remember the people who gave their lives to rescue others. Remember those who are lined up around the country to give of their blood, to give of their resources, to give of their prayers and their tears. That is God among us. God in the flesh. The Body of Christ. Those acts live on, both in this life and in the life to come. When we act in love, we do something eternal because we act in God.

In the essay at the end of Time Magazine's special edition, Lance Morrow encouraged Americans to allow hatred to build into a fury, a "ruthless indignation" that would fuel our vengeance on the terrorists. That is one choice that we have. That is the choice made by those who masterminded Tuesdays attacks. We can, if we wish, become like them. But there is another way.

We can allow compassion and care for one another to build into a tower of love that cannot be conquered even by death. We can allow small acts of peace and truth to gather strength until liberty and justice for all rolls across the world like a mighty river. As a nation we can be fueled by our hatred until we become a suicide pilot that destroys us along with our enemies. Or we can allow love to turn us into rescue workers, thinking less of our own lives than of a world in peril.

In the dust of the World Trade Center the bodies lie mingled. Terrorists lie dead in the same heap as firefighters and police. On Calvary's hill, everyone died together. But, oh the difference come Sunday morning. In God's dawn, love could not be contained. The tomb was empty, for love could not die, and so it remains today. The World Trade Towers are dust. But God's tower of love endures forever. That is our hope. That has been our proclamation from the very first Easter over 2000 years ago. He lives! So do we.

Amen.