

Day by Day  
10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 9/11

Romans 14:1-12  
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Hampton Baptist Church

For some people sharing their thoughts, let alone deep felt emotions, can be difficult. I understand this; I come from a family that never has been demonstrative in expressing feelings or emotions. Even though my parents never said, "We love you" to each other or us I knew my they loved each other and my brother and me. It has just been over the past year or so that my parents have begun to write in cards or when we leave their house after a visit to say "We love you" or "We are proud of you." That is why when I heard the story of Bob I understood what he felt.

In a seminary class the divinity students were practicing the art of "active listening." Each student had to interview another student and draw out of them a story about a conflict they have with a family member. "Bob," talked about conflicts with his Dad. They were as different as night and day. Bob was Triple A: athletics, academics, arts. What's more, he was the "life-of-the-party" kind of guy. "Bob's" dad had dropped out of high school, worked a series of hands-on, back breaking jobs throughout his life, and had many physical problems. He was quiet and rarely showed his emotions - positive or negative.

But despite their differences, Bob and his Dad always watched a weekly football game together on the saggy old family room couch. And at some point during the game, Bob's Dad would reach over and hold his son's hand for a few moments, squeezing it a couple of times and then releasing it. Those football games were his Dad's way of communicating the love he had for his son, the love he could not express with words.

I've got to tell you standing here today is pretty daunting for me. I don't feel that I am up to the task of giving you words that will address the horror and heritage of 9-11. After 10 years the emotions and vivid images still seem so fresh. Today is the 10th anniversary of 9-11. It is also the first day of official NFL Sunday afternoon football. As we struggle to find images and stories that might reveal the depth of our emotions on this tenth anniversary of that day when so much changed, believe it or not we can connect with some of those feelings by holding hands and watching a football game.

The first four televised games of the 2011 NFL season were specifically chosen to commemorate the events of 9-11.

At 1 p.m. there is a game between Pittsburgh and Baltimore - midway between those two cities is Shanksville, PA, the site of the crash of flight 93, which the terrorists had destined for the White House. Later in the afternoon there is a game between the New York Giants and the Washington Redskins, played only a few miles from the site of the Pentagon plane crash.

This afternoon there is also a game between Carolina and Arizona, which will feature ceremonies honoring Pat Tillman, the Cardinals player who left a lucrative pro-football career to join the military after the 9-11 attacks and who was killed in action in Iraq.

Finally the Dallas Cowboys will play the New York Jets just across the Hudson River in full view of where the Twin Towers once stood.

Whether you are a football fan or not today may be a good day to do something so "normal" as watch a football game and hold hands with your loved ones as you enjoy the simple act of being together and watch a football game.

There is really only one way to get through the horror of an event like 9-11 and that is day by day. Twelve Step recovery programs, like Alcoholics Anonymous or Gamblers Anonymous, all emphasize that recovery is a day-by-day, sometimes even an hour-by-hour, journey. That is why alcoholics and addicts are always recovering, never fully cured. They know that every single day is a chance to move forward and resist the undertow of the old demons.

But every day is also a day where weakness or despair might lead to a slip up, a stumble, a bad choice. Since 9-11 we have all been on a day-by-day journey of recovery. Recovery from horror. Recovery from hatred. Recovery from the realization that the world does not love us. Recovery from a fear of the future. Recovery from vengeance. Recovery from grief and despair.

In 1971 a Stephen Schwartz musical opened on Broadway called Godspell. Day by Day one of the songs in the musical was so popular that it made it to #13 on the Billboard charts.

Day by Day

Oh dear Lord, three things I pray:

To see thee more clearly,

Love thee more dearly,

Follow thee more nearly . . .

Day by Day by Day.

I want to take a few minutes and use the words from this simple song to help us continue in our recovery process as we remember that horrible day.

First, To See Thee More Clearly: We witnessed unthinkable acts of evil and hatred on September 11, 2001. But we also witnessed the presence of those who had faith in the living Lord.

How could we not see Jesus' love and sacrifice in the selfless actions of the fire fighters, police, rescue personal, and of all the ordinary men and women who suddenly found themselves in the midst of the chaos?

I read an article this week about the NYPD and NYFD that described what many of those officers and firefighters may have been thinking that morning.

These individuals whose aspirations in life were the most humbling – save enough for a house in the burbs, enough to put their children through college, that long dreamed-of trip back to the old sod or whatever country bore their ancestors, the highlight of their week shooting the breeze over a few ice-cold beers – for many hundreds of these men these dreams and aspirations were to lay unfulfilled in the ruins and the wreckage of the World Trade Center.

As they donned their breathing equipment and held their torch-fire axes, many stood in silence, attempting to comprehend the incomprehensible as they stared skyward at what appeared to many as Dante's Inferno. Some made frantic cellphone calls home, fully knowing it may be their last, some blessed themselves and prayed to their god, many thinking they may see him soon. If they were fearful, they did not show it, for it was not fear and self-motivation that propelled these individuals into the World Trade Center and up smoke-filled stairwells.

It was, to quote Chief Edward F. Croker, "an act of unselfish bravery." Chief Croker said, "When a man becomes a firefighter, his greatest act of bravery has already been accomplished." These sons and daughters of immigrants were the finest examples of bravery humanity has ever produced. The compassion beating in the hearts of these individuals will remain unsurpassed in our lifetime. They defined everything great about the nation and the unconquerable soul of the human spirit.

On that day . . . there were an innumerable and unbelievable amount of sacrificial acts offered by everyday heroes. Some people wrapped their arms around their friends and co-workers and helped them get away from the horror. Some people ran into buildings everyone else was trying to flee. Some uttered prayers. Others declared, "Let's roll." All acted according to the call of that moment, according to the needs of others on that day.

Next is To Love Thee More Dearly: Paul loved to talk about the power of love. The absolute pre-eminence of love. Loving the neighbor. Loving the enemy. Loving the one you know is wrong and who is convinced they are right. Loving those who are different. Loving those who are too much the same as ourselves. Loving under any and all conditions.

John Paul DeVito and Harry Ramos both worked at the May Davis Group, a small investment bank, on the 87th floor of 1 World Trade Center. Two ordinary people, like countless others, their lives were turned upside down and forced to make extraordinary choices. Mr. DeVito agonized about leaving his office and responsibilities, but took charge, organized the employees, and led them, including Mr. Ramos, down stairwells on their way to safety. Before leaving the offices, Mr. Ramos stopped to cajole Hong Zhu, another May Davis employee who stood frozen in fear, into joining them down the stairs. On the 53rd floor, their group passed a stranger, a very heavy man named Victor, whose legs were injured and seemed unable to support him. Mr. Ramos and Mr. Zhu stopped. They helped Victor to his feet and supported him as he slowly made his way down the stairs. On the 36th floor Victor gave up, "I can't move my legs anymore," he said. A fireman rushing by told them to leave Victor and get out. Mr. Zhu continued down, but behind him he heard Mr. Ramos saying: "Victor, don't worry, I'm with you." Mr. Zhu reached Mr. DeVito and the others just as the neighboring 2 World Trade Center was collapsing. Once they were safely away, they turned to see the other tower toppling. No one has seen Mr. Ramos since.

Finally, Follow Thee More Nearly: For Christians Jesus' life is NOT just a historical event that took place long ago in the past. For Christians Jesus' life is a path we are called to "follow more nearly" day by day. We CAN live our lives following in Christ's footsteps when we "belong" to the Body of Christ, when we "belong" to God. We can follow him "day by day."

"Following" is a series of small steps, one after another, over the entire course of our lives. Discipleship is a journey in which we will never reach our final destination in this lifetime. When we do reach the end of our discipleship journey we need to remember that the questions will not be,

"How much have you gotten?" but "How much have you given?"

Not "How much have you won?" but "How much have you done?"

Not "How much have you saved?" but "How much have you sacrificed?"

The question will be "How much have you loved and served," not "How much were you honored?"

Living "day by day" is the only way we can turn horror into hope. There is no denying the horrors that were visited us ten years ago. But there is also no denying the examples of sacrifice, of love, of faith and of hope for a new day that were demonstrated by a long line of heroes, men and women and children, on and since that day.

God hath not promised  
Skies ever blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways  
All our lives through;

God hath not promised

Skies without rain,  
Joy without sorrow,  
Peace without pain.

But God hath promised  
Strength for the day,  
Rest for the labor,  
Light for the way,

Grace for the trials,  
Help from above,  
Unfailing sympathy,  
Undying love.ö  
Annie-Johnson Flint

Every dayô day by dayô there is the opportunity to encounter the power of the living God in our midst.  
Every dayô day by dayô there is no greater message we can offer to the world, to our neighbors, to our families, than this:

see Jesus more clearly,  
love Jesus more dearly,  
follow Jesus more nearly . . .  
day by day by day.  
Amen