

St. Andrew's Sermons
The Rev. John D. Rohrs
13 Pentecost A; Sept. 11, 2011
Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

Remember to Love

Ten years ago this morning came a moment of terror that many of us will never forget. We will always remember where we were, how we felt, what we did. I was in Chapel Hill, NC, in a staff meeting at the nonprofit where I worked. Someone burst into the conference room and told us to turn on the television. We stared in disbelief at the scene, and we watched in real time as the second plane hit the tower. I remember we all just stood there speechless for what seemed like the longest time, and then something clicked and we all started thinking of people we needed to call. After a few hours, my boss couldn't take it anymore and he asked me to drive with him to his church. So we did; we knelt there in a little chapel, both feeling lost and wondering what would come.

For some people, time has eased the fears and healed the wounds of that morning. But for others, surely it still feels like yesterday, and there's no amount of time that could relieve the pain. What makes it even harder, of course, is that the pain didn't end there. As we look back over these ten years, it's not just about that day. Those attacks gave way to two wars and the deaths of tens of thousands more. Today, we remember all of this. And it's important to say why we remember. We remember not for the sake of re-living past horrors or re-igniting lingering hatreds; no, we remember in order to honor those who died, in order to pray for God's healing, and most of all in order to commit ourselves to imagining a different future.

Remembering is one of the central acts of the Christian life. It's what we do every week when we gather for communion. We remember an act of terror – a man publicly tortured and killed. We remember the grief of his friends and the confusion of his followers. We remember an image of great suffering and evil – the Messiah nailed to a cross – and yet we look back not in despair but in the hope and conviction that there is more to the story, and that somehow a new vision of love emerged from the shadows of that death. When we gather for communion, when we receive the bread and wine, we literally re-member, re-orient, re-organize ourselves into the Body of Christ because we believe in a God who can bring love out of hate and life out of death.

Trinity Church, Wall Street is right down the road from Ground Zero. It's where Archbishop Rowan Williams and many others took shelter during the attacks. I looked up what they were doing at Trinity to mark this anniversary, and on their website the rector posted a simple message that really struck me. It's about remembering. He says:

Ten years ago, the final act of many 9/11 victims was one of love. Facing the unthinkable, their parting gesture was to reach out to their families, friends and colleagues. Ten years later, let us 'Remember to Love' those who are gone, those who remain and those yet to come. Let us remember and honor those who perished by generating a community committed to reconciliation and peace.

Let us remember to love. Remember to love those who died and those who grieve, those who fought and those who saved, those who were friends and those who were enemies, those who are gone, those who remain and those yet to come. Let us remember to love.

When we do that, we don't simply look backward; we also look forward. And that's the connection for us here this morning. It seems strange: here we are on the anniversary of 9/11 but it's also our kickoff Sunday. It's the start of an exciting season of education and ministry. We look forward to our Centennial celebration and much more. It seems incongruous until you consider that that simple message, that mantra really strips things down to what is most important, to the reason this church has been here for the last one hundred years and to the mission we have before us in the century to come. Remember to love – as widely and as deeply as possible. Remember to trust – in a God who can bring healing and hope out of even the darkest of moments. Remember to strive – for that day of peace that dimly shines. This is why we are here. Let us remember, always, to love. Amen.