

Sermon for September 11, 2016
15th Anniversary of 9/11
“Where Are You Now?”

Ezra 3:10-13
Luke 15:1-10

We all remember where we were 15 years ago today. At least those who were old enough. I was in the hospital. One of my church members had been operated on the day before and I was checking on him early that morning before my 10 am Tuesday Bible Study. We were sitting talking and he had CNN on the TV with the sound turned down. Then he interrupted our discussion about physical therapy and recovery to say, “Is that the World Trade Center on fire?”

We turned up the sound to find out what was going on. One of the commentators speculated that a plane had hit the building. That didn’t make any sense. It was clear day and a plane could have easily avoided the towers even if it were off course. Then as we watched the live video of the first tower burning, out of the edge of the screen came a jet that plowed directly into the second tower. It all became clear. Someone had planned this as an attack.

People reacted in different ways. Emotions ran the gamut from grief to anger to shock to depression. We have come a long way since that day. We entered into a war in Afghanistan and one could argue that the invasion of Iraq was a result of 9/11 too. “Ground Zero” became a place in Lower Manhattan instead of just the way of naming any location of an explosion. A memorial and museum were built and the new “Freedom Tower” or “One World Trade Center” was built as a memorial and a symbol of hope.

You remember where you were 15 years ago. But where are you now? How far have you come?

Our lesson from Ezra tells the story of the dedication of the foundations of the new temple. When Judah was conquered, Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. It had been devastating to the Jewish people. God’s house in their midst had been destroyed by an invading army. Then the leaders of the people were carried off into captivity to serve a king far from the Promised Land.

After they returned they began to rebuild the temple. The temple that Solomon had built was magnificent. But when the new temple foundations were dedicated some of the old people wept. The responses were many. Some sang praises to God. Some wept openly. Joy and sadness, grief and hope, all at the same time.

A lot had happened since the temple had been destroyed. The people had gone off into exile and then come back. Amazingly they had maintained their way of life and religion during the generation of exile. They had also grown spiritually. But those who had seen Solomon's temple still mourned at the same time that they praised God that a new temple was being built.

Where are you now? Many are still living in a state of fear and hopelessness. Now I am not talking about taking security precautions. Sure, I remember the day when you could go all the way to the gate in the airport to see someone off or welcome them back. Now you can't get beyond the lobby of the airport where the check in desks are without a ticket. We are still threatened by terrorists, and we need to take precautions.

That is not what I am talking about. I am talking about people being motivated by fear and hopelessness. We see it in much of the rhetoric of the politicians this year. Many are taking advantage of those fears and insecurities to manipulate people.

What's worse is that some people just give up. Instead of struggling against the fear they give in to it. This leads to despair and violence. It can lead to religious bigotry and racism.

We can choose to sit in our fear and hopelessness or we can move on. We can choose to build something out of the rubble of the destruction. The Israelites who returned could have sat in the rubble of their once beautiful temple and wallow in their own sorrow. But they chose to build a new temple and that was not easy. The task would take generations. In the same way our country decided to build something out of the rubble of the World Trade Center. A beautiful museum and memorial and a tower reaching to the sky were the result.

We can choose to move from the rubble of our lost innocence and our fear. Let's choose to build something beautiful. Let's reach out to our neighbor. Let's reject bigotry born of fear. Let us, like Jesus, in love seek out the lost.

Where are you now? If you are still experiencing loss and fear and hopelessness, let me offer you hope. Jesus is a good shepherd who seeks out the lost. He can heal our broken hearts. He can help us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Put your faith in him and abandon fear. With his help we can build something beautiful out of the rubble of destruction.