

Anniversaries remind us who we are, as we live held between memory and hope." They mark an event or occasion that impacted our lives in a certain way. Some anniversaries we celebrate – like a wedding or the year a ministry or organization was started is a happy occasion. Some anniversaries are sad, like the loss of a parent, friend or family member. Today and these days surrounding Sept 11 are anniversary days for us as we remember, grieve and mourn the pain, loss of life, loss of innocence 5 years ago at the WTC, Pentagon and in PA. Anniversaries make us remember.

What I remember most about that day and the days following is the chaos, the lack of feeling grounded that many felt. It wasn't only buildings that shook, but people and our faith shook at times, too. And I remember many people asked, "Where is God? How could God let this happen? Why does God allow evil?"

5 years ago, many of us looked to the Bible – the sacred writings, our history of God acting in the world for comfort, for peace. This 5th anniversary marks an event that in many ways is still ongoing and about which there isn't a national consensus or closure, I think the question for us today is, "what is the word of God for us in this unsettled and dangerous time?"

Today, the word from our gospel is that God heals in the middle of unsettled and dangerous time – God heals us on the journeys we walk that we are called to take. And God heals us when we don't even know it. In our gospel lesson today, 10 lepers come within shouting distance of Jesus. They beg, they petition him to make them well, to cure them. In great lament they cry out to this wandering healer.

Jesus sees them and tells them to present themselves to the priest and they set off on their journey. Then one, realizing he is cured suddenly rushes back to Jesus, falls at his feet and praises Jesus for curing his skin disease. Jesus wonders where the others are; wonders why only this foreigner has come to give thanks. And, then Jesus extends complete healing to this man – your faith has made you well – this phrase is also translated – your faith has saved you

5 years ago we cried out, lamented. Cried for comfort, for peace, for safety; for assurances that loved ones would come home. Cries of rage, anger, hatred and revenge also went up. And within 2 years we got involved in not just one, but 2 wars to crush the enemy. And, around the world, the US and our allies are savior to some and lepers to others.

It is in the midst of this global setting, heightened security measures, news and talk shows asking, are we safer, more secure than we were 5 years ago that we gather today.

Although for many, the intensity of emotion has lessened, we still cry out to Jesus. In the words, notes and melodies of Johan Sebastian Bach, we "hasten with feeble, most desperate longing to Jesus". We long for Jesus to raise his head up, to see us - lepers scarred by pain, grief, anger, greed, power and revenge. We lift our voices calling out to

Jesus who is faithfully searching. Calling for his mercy, the lessening of pain and our troubled hearts and minds to be comforted.

Like the lepers who could not cure themselves, we cannot cure our pain, our mislaid energies, our hardened hearts. We cannot heal ourselves, but Jesus can.

In shock and grief 5 years ago, it was inconceivable to many how we as individuals might heal. Here are just two stories of healing that I've come across this week.

Peaceful Tomorrows is an organization founded by family members of those killed on September 11th. In their grief and as part of their healing, they have united to turn their pain into actions for peace. They develop and advocate nonviolent options and actions in the pursuit of justice in hopes of breaking the cycles of violence engendered by war and terrorism. Members of this group have set aside the fact that Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda were based in Afghanistan, and have there, to where the War on Terror was begun, proclaiming alternatives to violence. Some have joined the Women to Women International Project to Afghanistan – connecting women and offering financial support. Healing of the grateful and the ungrateful that is allowing them to work for peace and non-violence around the world.

Another story of healing was told on PBS this week by an Episcopal priest who worked at Ground Zero. Reverend Janet Vincent worked for months with the crews that were clearing GZ, that were finding remains. She brought bread and sandwiches for the workers, comforted family members, and was a witness of God's love. All the while, struggling in her own heart and mind at what to do with anger and an unwillingness to forgive the attackers and the planners of these attacks. At ground 0, she wore a mask to keep some debris away, but not all. When she saw a doctor because of some respiratory problems, he said that she would probably always have Mohammad Atta, one of the attackers cells, in her lungs. Not long after that, she had a dream where she died and Jesus met her at the door of heaven and said, "Janet, it's nice you've come, but you have something to give this man". She looked and concluded that it was Mohammad Atta and at that moment she woke up. She was not able to forgive him, to give him part of himself back. Months passed and she went on a walk. As she walked, she realized she was breathing clearly, not carrying the same particles in her lungs, nor the heaviness of resentment. Somewhere, somehow, she had come to forgive and give something back to Mohammad Atta – and she hadn't done anything.

The one leper who returned to give thanks to Jesus saw more than the others. That is, he came to understand, that Jesus didn't just cure him of his disease. This man could now enter back into society, into relationships with his family. This man received healing in addition to being cured and he recognized it as God's goodness, God's creative power restoring wholeness where flaking and contamination had dominated.

The point is that God acted to bring order out of chaos – out of God's created good gone wrong, God brought good. Again and again, the Bible shows us where God acted to renew and restore all of creation to its intended good, to wholeness. People like Janet

September 10, 2006

5th Anniversary of September 11

Bach Cantata "Jesus You Have Freed My Soul" No. 78

Luke 17:11-19

Vincent and organizations like Peaceful Tomorrows are powerful witnesses to God's healing in our own unsettled and dangerous times. Like the lepers we bring our sorrow, grief and pain, our heavy burdens to Jesus. And Jesus takes his place by our sides, lightens our hearts, sets us free.

Let us come to the table as the one leper came to Jesus – come to Jesus, giving thanks for our healing, for the healing of the world, and receive Christ who heals all.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.