



A Note from the Pastor's Corner

Sadly – from my point of view, anyway – I was “stoned” on Sunday, September 11th and unable to be in our sanctuary that morning. By “stoned”, I mean a kidney stone was passing through, having decided that Saturday around midnight was as good a time as any to depart. What did you think I meant?

It saddened me because I was eagerly looking forward to sharing our pulpit with my Muslim friend, Khalil Abdul-Khabir. We will be re-scheduling his visit with us in the very near future – hopefully, sometime in October. The fact that September 11th came and went doesn't really affect the theme of the message we felt led to bring.

Have you ever heard of the Hatfields and the McCoys? A feud ignited between these two families – neighbors, actually – one from the Kentucky side of the border and the other from West Virginia. The Hatfields fought in the Confederate Army and the McCoys for the Union Army. I'll spare you details, but for close to 30 years, serious blood was shed among the two families leading to over a dozen deaths – including public hangings – and scores wounded.

So, what does that have to do with 9/11? Plenty. The issue of ‘honor’ and ‘remembering’ resulted in a simmering, barely below-the-surface anger that fed suspicions and hatred between the two families. Long after the initial event, reliving that and all the follow-up slights that followed did nothing but deepen the entrenched loathing between these two extended families.

In the months and weeks leading up to the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 events, we had been overloaded with print, broadcast, internet, and public remembrances of those events. To some extent, this is important for several reasons. It reminds us that evil is alive and active in our world. It reminds us that we need to be ready to identify evil when we see it. It reminds us that evil must be confronted when it is identified. It reminds us that nobody is immune from the effects of evil. The Bible reminds us that the iniquity of fathers will be visited upon their children and grandchildren for up to five generations. In other words, for at least as long as the one committing an evil act shall live, his descendents will suffer because of it.

We also need to be reminded that evil lives in the hearts of every person. Whether or when it erupts in evil actions is a complex issue from which nobody is immune and that I believe nobody truly understands. Hiding behind religious platitudes is a common form of denial. No matter who we are, we have been impacted by the evil actions of others – and others have been impacted by our evil actions. It's just that some evil actions are more dastardly and far-reaching than others.

So, what's going through your mind right now? The evil that you have endured? The persons behind those evil deeds that impacted your life? <anger!> Perhaps even the evil thoughts and, yes, evil deeds that you yourself have given birth to? <justification!> See what happens when we dwell on such events? It's all about “look what happened to me – to us!”

And what about thoughts of – forgiveness? Are they anywhere to be found? What do you think Jesus would have to say about that? If you recall, being an apprentice of Jesus is not a part-time thing. It's not something one can be only when it's easy, or convenient; or when it doesn't challenge them or – heaven forbid! – lead them in a path opposite from the direction in which the world around us is pushing.

And where is the open, honest, and calm discussion about what gave birth to the 9/11 events? True forgiveness cannot even be approached without this vitally important and humbling experience of self-assessment. Although some individuals in small venues have taken on that task, we are still waiting for a political leader with the courage, honesty, integrity, and God-inspired desire for peace and reconciliation to lead us as a nation into that process.

That is the cornerstone of peacemaking. Reconciliation demands it – and peace without reconciliation is not possible.

So, for me – and I believe Khalil would agree – living in the past and revisiting, once again, the events of 9/11 does not bring honor to God nor does it require the working of the Spirit of God. I realize that it would be quite easy to perform some entry-level verbal gymnastics to involve God's name, but that would be phony. I've read a lot of 9/11 related material and found some of it to be of value – but not very helpful in bringing us to where I believe God wants us to be.

Reconciliation is a lengthy and difficult process. The first requirement is to realize that it is necessary and why it is necessary. We aren't close to that point yet. But we can get there. We can get to the point where the desire for reconciliation takes root in our heart and propels us toward that goal. And I believe that what Khalil and I envision is a small but important step in getting the seed for that desire planted in our hearts.

Grace and peace, Pastor Bud