

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins on September 11, 2022, at St. Christopher by the Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland.**

9/11. That's where we are in our secular calendar. And that's where we are in our lessons today.

In the passage from Exodus, God is angry. He has liberated the people from Egypt, only to have the people take it for granted. But before the wrath of God can "consume" the people, Moses implores God to "turn from your fierce wrath, change your mind, and do not bring disaster on your people." "And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people."

Not quite what happened on our 9/11.

This apparent divide between Divine intervention to save lives and apparent Divine non-intervention to allow lives to be destroyed makes us question our faith. Why didn't God intervene? Was there a reason? Or perhaps, is there no God?

Yes, 9/11 made us think, and makes us think. We always wonder about tragedy. What if ..... If only I had ..... How dare those people ... Why them, not me?

People of faith – that would be you and I, by our presence today – don't shy away from these questions. We confront them all the time. There is always human suffering that might have been prevented, and was not. Where was God? Where is God? Is there a God?

Oh yes, we have questions. And, yes, sometimes our questions are filled with anger. But here we are, addressing the same God that Moses implored, with hope that there will be a good outcome. And, if not a good outcome, lessons learned that will benefit others.

From today's Psalm (**Psalm 51:11**): "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." The less poetic version of this is "Suck it up, Charlie!"

In his letter to Timothy (**I Timothy 1:17**), Paul writes “But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the upmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life.”

In other words, you people of faith – that would be you and I – keep your heads about you so that you can help others keep their heads about them. I know you’re hurting. Everybody is hurting. But you’re a healer, not a hurter.

Think of all the people on 9/11 who stepped up to help heal. And much of that was not on a grand scale, as necessary and as impressive that those grand scale actions were. No, most of the healing was on an individual basis and over time. And, for some, the need for healing persists.

It’s as if today’s gospel was activated (**Luke 15:1-10**). One wounded person at a time. One lost sheep at a time. “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.” We lost a lot of coins on 9/11, but we saved a lot as well. And some of that saving continues. Once a healer, always a healer. People re-up, and the community, the nation, the world is better for it.

What was God’s role in all of this? Did God even have a role? Is there even a God? Yes, these very big questions exist. But so does our response to these very big questions. And what is that response? “Here I am, send me.”

Or, “Here we are, send us.” That’s who the Church is. That’s what we prepare for. That’s what we offer. Some bring equipment to the battle. Some bring supplies. And some bring faith. And some bring it all. Again, from First Timothy (**I Timothy 1:18**): “My son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight.”

Life is messy. It is what it is. Bad things happen, often because we or others misuse freedom. But good things also happen, because we use our freedom in a more positive manner, like preventing tragedy, and, when tragedy happens, to healing. Jesus used his freedom to die for us and rise for us and be there for all of us for all time. He fought the “good fight” and won!

Today's psalm captures our mission: "Make me hear of joy and gladness, that the body you have broken may rejoice." "Broken bodies" are part of life. All of us are subject to this reality. But "joy and gladness" are also part of life. And, for people of faith, "joy and gladness" are not just part of life, but the point of life.

And never underestimate the power of this belief, this commitment, this sense of what our role is. On 9/11, we were in awe of the sacrifices made and the healing that was begun and continues. Some of you may have been on the front lines. Many of you were impacted in highly personal ways. All of us were impacted in some manner. Whatever the nature of the impact, our faith in God's love and mercy persisted, and remains in effect. As does our sense of our role in this whole healing endeavor.

It's interesting, isn't it, that our Sunday lessons, written so long ago, seem so current. Seemingly, there is no rest for those who kill and maim. And no rest for those who pick-up the pieces and move ahead. And, yes, no rest for a God who sacrifices his own Son to show us both the depth of sadness and the height of healing. Remember this description from Exodus (**Exodus 32:14**): "And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people."

We don't always understand the Lord's strategy, but we do believe that at the heart of the Lord's strategy is Love. And that's where you and I place our trust. And that trust is at the heart of our remembrance of 9/11. As we do every year, we remember those who died on that September day, those who sacrificed their lives for others, those who lost loved ones, those who continue to hurt, those who healed then and continue to heal, those who work for peace at every level, and those grounded in a faith, a trust, that supports all.

And here we are, including Frankie. Welcome aboard, young lady, and join us as we do our best to "keep the Faith." *Amen.*