

Worship for September 12, 2021

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship Psalm 46:1-3, 7

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble.

**Therefore, we shall not fear, though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be hurled into the sea,
though the waters rage and foam,
though the mountains tremble at the tumult.
Lord God of hosts, be with us still.**

*Hymn 687 O God, Our Help in Ages Past

Prayer of the Day

**Strong God of love,
your Son, Jesus, told us that in this world we will endure tribulation.
If we should suffer for righteousness sake,
save us from self-righteousness.
Give us grace to pray for our enemies,
and to forgive, even as you have forgiven us.
Through Jesus Christ, who was crucified, but is risen. Amen.**

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.”

In the name of our gracious Savior, our sins are forgiven.

Be at peace and pray for the peace of the world.

First Reading

Time With Our Young Disciples

Presentation of Bibles

*“As Jesus grew taller, he continued to grow in wisdom.
God was pleased with him and so were the people who knew him.”*

Marren Foster, Hunter Miller, Kinley Napier, Barrett Seay

Gospel Reading
Morning Message

If you read the September edition of our church newsletter, much of this message will sound familiar. But, as we came closer to September 11, I felt compelled to return to it.

Last week had been a heavy week for Ed. He fell asleep soon after coming home Friday afternoon. Later, we set out on a “Fri-date” Destination? The exotic and acclaimed Midway Drive In, followed by ice cream at Austin’s. We had the high school game on the radio. I remembered the words of a dear friend, a great cheerleader for Huntington, would sometimes say. “Life is good. Why would anyone want to live anywhere else?”

Indeed. The little outing had revived us. We would be ready to cheer on our favorite teams Saturday. We might even get a little work done around the house. The weekend was looking hopeful.

Which brings us to today. Rally Day, and the return to some of our usual offerings. We have just recognized our younger members and presented them with a Bible, our rule of faith and life for centuries. We will gather again this evening to break bread or cake, to laugh and play and enjoy our fellowship.

Life *is* good. We thank God for it every day.

But, it’s quite the contrast, isn’t it?

*Try to remember the kind of September
when life was slow and oh, so mellow.
Try to remember the kind of September
when grass was green and grain was yellow.
Try to remember the kind of September
when you were a tender and callow fellow.
Try to remember, and if you remember,
then follow, follow.*

“Try to Remember,” by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt, is the signature song from *The Fantasticks*, the musical comedy that premiered off-Broadway in 1960. It directs the audience to recall the sweet times of the past, when love was fresh and uncomplicated. The popular show ran continuously until January of 2002, for a total of 42 years, making it the world’s longest-running musical.

It was known for its small cast, sparse set, an orchestra consisting of piano and harp, and the intimacy of a small theatre. I've lost count of how many times I've seen *The Fantasticks*. The plot was classic love story, reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet* or *A Mid-summer's Night's Dream*. The cast was always superb and the music just beautiful. I never grew tired of it.

For those of us who witnessed the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001, "Try to Remember" prompts other memories, and an unwelcome return to the scenes of death and destruction that engulfed New York City, Washington, DC, and rural Pennsylvania on that bright fall morning. As the day unfolded, the entire nation shared in that suffering. For some, the suffering will never end this side of heaven.

So much has changed since that day. The grief and loss were profound. Our senses of safety and security were gravely diminished. Fear seemed to hang like a pall over us. Even now, a "new normal" can be elusive. The disruption of the pandemic testifies to that.

On this, the twentieth anniversary of the 9/11 events, we may likely feel some of the same horror of that time- the sadness, the anger, the urge to retaliate. These are normal responses and we need to sit with them awhile.

But, I hope you will also remember that day's many courageous and heroic acts, the strength and determination of injured people pulling others out of piles of concrete, steel, and refuse. I hope you remember the hundreds of first responders who ran into the face of danger. I hope you will recall the numerous accounts of kindness and compassion, the stories of strangers sitting with the dying, so that they did not take their final breaths alone.

We have been saturated in recent days by 9/11-inspired media presentations. Some are just too brutal to watch. But, some are filled with hope. One that touched me deeply was the show that focused on the children whose fathers were killed in the attacks. Many who were not yet born.

So many of the now-adult children described a sense of connection they felt with the father who never held them, or taught them to ride a bike, or dropped them off at school. Many had followed in their fathers' footsteps, becoming firefighters, EMTs, or police officers themselves.

And they paid tribute to the strength and commitment of their mothers.

One of the most moving stories was that of a young woman from Bangladesh. She and her husband had come to the United States so that he might pursue an academic career as a physicist. After 9/11, her veiled head and dark complexion made her a target for hatred and ridicule. She had little to no support, even though she and her small children were victims, too. And yet, she persevered.

There was a video of the day she took her driver's test. When she was told she had passed, this beautiful, sad, young woman began to sob as if her heart would break. Driving was something her husband did. It was a cultural thing. This was just one more thing that confirmed how drastically her life had changed.

Today, her children are grown and successful. They made a good life in the face of overwhelming challenges. They are resilient.

I hope you will consider the power of human resilience, the result of our deep need to restore order and set even higher dreams for our community, our nation, and the world. I hope you will notice progress made in a multitude of human endeavors. I hope you understand that inspiration knows no limits.

I also hope you will remember that in the days following 9/11, we found strength and comfort in our Christian faith. We turned to scripture and prayer and gathering together for worship. We participated in outreach ministries. We re-committed ourselves, our homes, and our churches to the pursuit of peace, not only for ourselves, but for all people and nations, races, and religions.

In these things, we do find purpose and meaning. Grace is not over-rated. The acts of worship, at home and at church, still set us on a firm foundation. The fellowship of the faith community still provides a place of belonging, where we know we are welcome and loved. Acts of care and compassion still connect us to the Christ who gave of himself, even unto death, that we might live.

*Try to remember when life was so tender
that no one wept except the willow.*

*Try to remember the kind of September
when love was an ember about to billow.*

*Try to remember and if you remember
then follow, follow, follow...*

*Deep in December, it's nice to remember
although you know the snow will follow.*

*Deep in December, it's nice to remember
the fire of September that made us mellow.*

*Deep in December, our hearts should remember
and follow, follow, follow...*

*Hymn Gloria Patri
Sharing Our Joys and Concerns
Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting our Tithes and Offerings
Prayer of Dedication

**Blessed are you, O God, maker and giver of all gifts.
Use us and what we have gathered to bless the world with your love and grace,
through the One who gave his life for us. Amen.**

*Hymn 39 Great Is Thy Faithfulness
*Blessing Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

**Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.**

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.

**For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.**

*Postlude