



## Message from Pastor Tim

### *September 2011: Is Forgiveness Possible?*

*Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. Matthew 18:21-22*

It may be hard to believe but on second Sunday in September we will be commemorating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. With the exception of the very young among us, I'm quite sure there isn't a person who doesn't remember where they were when they heard of the attack. Most of us saw over and over again the images of the airliners crashing into the Twin Towers. I doubt many of us will forget that day.

When I was doing worship planning for that September 11, 2011, I was trying to think of what text to use that might convey the proper sentiments of our theological beliefs. Then I looked up the appointed text from the lectionary for that date, and it was Matthew 18:21-35 (a portion of which appears at the beginning of this article). Even though the lectionary follows a three year cycle, it just so happens that this particular text falls on the Tenth Anniversary of 9/11. Could it be that the Word of God is trying to point us to a deeper truth in the midst of this day of deep deliberation?

To quote from a letter that the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, Bishop Mark Hansen, sent out this past May:

"On September 11, President Obama will dedicate a national memorial to those who died on that day ten years ago. This memorial is made possible by the Association of Victim's Families, a group founded, funded and supported by the ELCA through Lutheran Disaster Response of New York. Even as we dedicate this national memorial, we affirm that our real strength lies in our neighborliness and in relationships that have the power to shape the future of religious expression in this country.

In the 2004 ELCA message, "[Living in a Time of Terrorism](#)", this church made sober assessments about what it means to be Lutheran in the United States at a moment when Islam is so quickly paired with terrorism. As Lutherans, we affirm our baptismal commitment "to proclaim the good news" and "strive for justice and peace in all the earth." These words are often spoken on Sundays in our congregations throughout the ELCA, where we pray "for all the baptized everywhere" to be "sent into the world to witness" to God's love. The liberating power of the gospel releases us from human limitations so that we are freed in Christ to reach out to all our neighbors.

In the past ten years, ELCA members have served frequently with Muslim, Jewish, Christian and other religious partners in efforts to heal national wounds and address the rise of bias against Muslims. A Quran burned in Florida or Michigan is an attack against the very faith we confess if we do not speak out on behalf of our neighbors. Religion must not be used as a foil for human hate; we know that Muslims join us in our commitment to combat terrorism. As we seek to build trust through these relationships, we experience the truth that terrorism is not in the core of any religion, that sacred scriptures have deep relevance to communities today, and that God's vision for our future will not be diminished by unchecked fear."

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“God’s vision for our future will not be diminished by unchecked fear.” I personally believe that the only way that can be accomplished is through our acceptance of the gift of forgiveness that has been given to each us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Father Robert Capon in his book “The Parables of Grace” writes about this particular parable from Matthew and the topic of forgiveness: “In heaven there are only forgiven sinners. There are no good guys, no upright, successful types who, by the dint of their own integrity, have been accepted into the great country club in the sky. There are only failures, only those who have accepted their deaths in their sins and who have been raised up by the King who himself died that we might live.”

As we approach the anniversary of this tragedy there will be many different speeches and philosophies expressed. I’m quite sure the media will be saturated with the remarks of politicians and pundits. I urge all of us to remember the words of Jesus, who through his forgiveness, brought newness of life to this broken world.

I urge all of us to join together in worship of September 11<sup>th</sup>, as we celebrate the King of Kings and his gift of forgiveness given freely to this hurting world.

**Pastor Tim**