

**Genesis 50:15-21**

Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, 'What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?' So they approached Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this instruction before he died, "Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you." Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, 'We are here as your slaves.' But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.' In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

**Romans 14:1-12**

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God. We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. 8If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.' So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

**"Ten Years Ago"****Rev. Charles Schuster****September 11, 2011**

The question that we ask ourselves, and have asked ourselves for the past ten years - Where was God on September 11, 2001? Where was God when those planes flew? Where was God? We ask that question so many times. There have been other times, a different question a bit. Some anonymous man or woman steps out of their desperate and incompetent life to carry out an act of violence, to make a name for themselves. Charles Manson, Helter-Skelter. John Hinckley Jr. shot President Reagan. Sirhan Sirhan killed Bobby Kennedy in the hotel kitchen in Los Angeles. James Earl Ray killed Martin Luther King Jr. on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel. Lee Harvey Oswald shot President Kennedy, he was in a book depository in Dallas. Klebold and Harris, a series of school

shootings and the massacre at Columbine and the tape they made in which they said "At least we will be remembered for the audacity and originality of our final action."

Desperate people, ignored people, hopeless people try to make a name for themselves. We can kind of understand that, but ten years ago it happened. Nobodies who wished to remain anonymous took action, sought destruction of a system, attempted to change history, to bring down a nation, and they didn't care if you and I knew their names, knew who they were. It didn't matter. They'd rather we didn't know. And they did it in the name of God. In the name of God. Where was God? And everything changed on September 11, and nothing added up. Anonymous terrorists, believers in God. And we increased security, and we recoiled in fear, and we armed ourselves and we did something else. We did two things, I think I hope. One of the things we did is, we found some common sense. Ten years. We found some common sense. At first we wanted to strike out, but we didn't know where. We wanted to reach out to somebody and hurt somebody, and we did. We went after the enemy, but we didn't know where the enemy was, because the enemy wasn't in a place. And we wanted at times to demonize a world religion as evil. That was ten years ago, and since then we have found some common sense, realizing if we label moderate people extreme, then they will become extreme, all of them. Common sense. We see it.

Joseph's brothers, jealous of him, wished to have him dead, staged his death. His coat of many colors covered with the blood of a lamb, put into a pit. Sold into slavery. Joseph had visions, predicted the famine, helped Egypt prepare for it, became a trusted advisor to Pharaoh. His brothers come to Egypt. They saw their brother Joseph, they begged him for food, feared he would hate them, but he didn't. He couldn't hate them. He had been hurt, but he didn't hate. "I am not God, I am not your judge. I forgive you. I embrace you." It was the best for Joseph. It is the best for us. Common sense. If we look up, where was God? We begin to see where God was. Common sense says we cannot control what others do to us, but we can control what we do when they do it. Common sense says, we will not compound atrocity by stooping to the level of those who would harm us. Common sense says, we do not turn to hate because we hurt.

Daniel Murphy understood it. His brother was killed at the Trade Center. He was asked if he was filled with anger. He said, "I have no anger in my heart. My brother was a vibrant, active, loving young man. We need to act to put an end to terrorism. We cannot allow our hearts to be filled with hatred, anger and revenge, because revenge just leads to revenge, more revenge, and it never ends. We need to seek justice, but not based on hatred or anger over what has happened, rather over concern for the whole human race." And he goes on, "When I see these flags everyone is wearing and flying, I hope they are symbols of our solidarity and our union as a nation in grieving and in reaching out in love and compassion to those who have suffered loss, because it's not about pride in guns or bombs or high tech weapons. But let it be a source of pride that we can be people who respond with love, compassion, and healing. Let it be a symbol of pride that we are a people who have always welcomed the stranger and have not shut out those who are different from ourselves." Common sense. We don't look down, we look up. We don't live in fear of the past, but hope for the future.

Jim Wallace talks about that day ten years ago. He lived in the nation's capital. "I could see the smoke coming from the Pentagon. I heard there were other planes on the way. I wondered, what should be our response? And then I wrote, 'We can deny them their victory by refusing to submit to the world created in their image.' Terrorism inflicts not only death and destruction but also emotional oppression to further their aims. We must not allow the terror to drive us away from being the people God calls us to be." Common sense, looking up, being reminded who we are.

Donna Miller, a member of our church, Red Cross volunteer. 9/11, she went to New York City. She was there after the bombings. She described the dust that was so thick. She would describe the blank look on people's faces. She saw people wandering the streets, holding signs of loved ones, 'Have you seen him?' 'Have you seen her?' She saw rows of ambulances at the end of each day leaving the area, and when they left, everyone stopped. Every person stopped, soldiers saluted. The ambulances carried the remains of those they had found that particular day. "There was a middle aged man," she said "I met him in an elevator. I saw him several times. One day he said to me, 'I'm learning English. I work at the hotel. When the plane hit the tower, they told us to get out of the building, so I started running. I got outside. I had to jump over bodies that were hitting the ground. I had to jump over them.'" He was very emotional. Donna Miller listened to him. "The elevator went up and back down and up again" She just stayed on that elevator and listened to that man talk, because he needed to talk. He needed to tell his story, and he did. She suggested he might want to go to the Red Cross center to get some counseling. When finally that elevator door opened and they were ready to get off, he looked at her and smiled and said, "Thank you for being a friend." Donna said, "When I returned I felt guilt. I survived, I helped, I felt good about what I had been able to do, but I felt guilt. And then I started focusing on the future and the possibilities of where I could make a difference, knowing what I am able to do."

Common sense. We can't hate because we hurt. We can't hold Islam responsible for the actions of a few. We look up, and we have learned in ten years, the world might be a frightening place, but we will not live in fear. Life does have its risks, and we will still take some ourselves. For William James is exactly right. His last words, he said, "My last words to you: Do not be afraid of life. Believe that life is worth living, and your belief will help create the fact." Common sense defeats revenge, and love will always conquer hate. Look up. Where was God, 9/11, ten years ago? What have we learned?

Secondly, in ten years, I think we are beginning to discover a common source. Sometimes what seems so strange to us is really much closer to us than we know. If we listen up, if we are apt to hold onto what we know as superior to those who are holding onto what is familiar to them and is superior to them, but it's different, and how can we understand each other? This isn't a new issue. Paul the Apostle had the same thing. He was a Jew. He believed Jesus was the Messiah, and he thought his purpose in life was to convey that to Gentiles, but Gentiles didn't observe the Jewish food laws, and they Jews insisted those laws were central, important, required. Gentiles and Jews didn't understand each other. They didn't worship the same God, they thought. Some judged one day to be

better than another. Is the Sabbath Saturday, or is the Sabbath Sunday, or is the Sabbath Friday? Some believed in eating everything, others do not. Kosher food, non-kosher food, food laws. "We do not live for ourselves," Paul wrote. "We live for God, each of us accountable to God," Paul said. Do we worship the same God? No matter how we practice our worship, do we have a common source? If we listen up we do. And think about it. Because we are Judeo-Christians. Our God is Yahweh, the God of Israel. Our God is for us made real in Jesus, the incarnation of God on earth. But even more than that, we are children of Abraham. Our God, the God of the Jew, the God of the Christian, the God of Islam. Common source. We worship God in different ways, and sometimes we distrust our worship. It is not clear if we have God to worship or something else. Sometimes our worship doesn't go right. Sometimes there are things right, and sometimes, there are things wrong.

Frederick Buechner said "You can sincerely believe there is no God and live as though there is, and you can just as sincerely believe that there is a God and live as though there isn't." Sometimes the way we carry out our Christianity is an embarrassment to Jesus. And for Jews, sometimes the way Jews carry out their Judaism is an embarrassment to Moses, and Muslims sometimes an embarrassment to Mohammed. Because we have a common source. If we listen up, we hear it. Like Jonah, who didn't want to go speak to the people of Babylon because they were the enemy. And then there was this big fish that swallowed him up and threw him on the beach and he did what he had to do, because we believe in the God of our people. They seem so different and yet they have some of the same needs. They have some of the same fears, they have some of the same hopes, and their God it's a different name, or is it a different language but the same name. If we listen up, if we hear the word of God, they hear the word of God. It came at creation, and it said, "This is good, this is very good." And it came to Moses, and God said "Tell them, let my people go, and take them out, Moses." It came to Sarah, it came to Ishmael, it came to Hagar, it came to Abraham, it came to Isaac, and God said to Abraham, "You don't need to sacrifice Isaac to prove your faith." Do not kill Ishmael. God spoke to Ishmael, the source of Islam. God's word comes to us. We listen up.

In a mosque in Los Angeles, at the end of the day, just after the bombings, one of the leaders was closing the door to the prayer room and a man came in, a man whose friend had died in the Trade Center in New York, came into the mosque. "I'm a Christian, I'm not a Muslim. I am not here to learn about Islam. I want to meet someone who is a Muslim. I need to know, is your God my God?" And the Muslim cleric and the Christian seeker stared at each other a long time, until the tears came, and they hugged, and they cried on each other's shoulders, because they worshipped the same God in a different way, but they found a common source.

Her name is Lisa. Her job was to connect those phone calls from the airplane to the people they were calling. 9:45 September 11, 2001, the call came in, a man she never met, a passenger on Flight 93, the plane had been hijacked. "Could you call my wife? Could you tell her that I love her? And could you tell her please, tell her to tell our boys that I love them. And would you do one more thing for me? Would you pray with me?" Lisa. What was her religion? It didn't matter. What was his religion? Was he Baptist? Or

Methodist? Or Presbyterian? Was she Muslim or Hindu? It didn't matter. She prayed with him. At the end they said the Lord's Prayer together, and when they finished, he said Amen and there was absolute silence until she heard something in the background. Someone said, "Let's roll." And the phone dropped.

Listen up to the God of all of us, to the common source. If we listen up, we hear it, the common source, the same God. One of our church members, JoAn Hopkins, was at the Pentagon ten years ago. JoAn Hopkins, Red Cross nurse, volunteered. I asked her what she experienced, and she told me what she heard. She said, "I was on the phone bank. I listened to the phone calls coming in. I heard gruesome details of carnage and wreckage, the calls that came, the details. The smell of jet fuel, the smell of death." She had been asked if she thought God cause it, and her answer, "Not my God. That was done by evil people. I refuse to believe my God would be part of that." And since that date, she would tell you, "I see life as very precious, and I have a need to be around happy people." My God wouldn't cause that. Her God didn't ask people to kill, never does ask us to kill. Our God is their God, the source of our spiritual life is a common source, because we are monotheists.

We believe in one God, and after all these years we're finally, I think, finally getting to hear it. It's not easy. The differences are difficult. If you listened to the Faith Club authors when they came, they didn't say their conversations were easy. They weren't. But we live in a time of hope for ourselves and our world where now religion maybe will help us build bridges and establish lines of life. We live in a time when we have a chance to enjoy the rich diversity of our religious traditions, common ground, common good, a common source. The God of some is the God of all of us. Hearers of the word from God that are trying to get us together. God is trying to get us together, for once and for all. Common ground, a common source. Looking for the common good. For some of us, it began in Jerusalem. For others of us, it began in Mecca. And for us, it began in Bethlehem. If we listen, we can hear it. Where was God on 9/11, ten years ago? Ten years ago when a small group of Islamic terrorists, not wishing to make a name for themselves, but hoping for a reward in heaven, took the lives of thousands of men, women and children, innocent men, women and children. Where was God that day?

I'll tell you where I think God was cheering the heroes who tried to save their lives, and God was weeping for the human race. Ten years ago I believe there was a God in despair, saying in whatever way God speaks, or whatever way God communicates to us if we hear it, "They committed acts of murder and in my name. What will it take to make them hear? To help them see? When will they ever learn? Thou shalt not kill, even in my name."