



“Remembering the Lost”

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
5:30 p.m. Saturday, September 10, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I need to ask your indulgence tonight, because as I was writing this, I had three different thoughts going through my head, and I am going to try to bring together to make one cohesive whole sermon.

The first thought is, as I am sure you all are aware, this is the weekend of remembering the September 11 attack. I know that I can, as I am sure probably many of you here can as well, remember where I was when I first heard the news, fifteen years ago. We were living in Elysburg, and I was pastor to two congregations. Every Tuesday morning, several of the area Lutheran pastors gathered together in a local diner to study the scripture for the upcoming Sunday. We had finished up, and I was in my car on the way home, when the announcer on the NPR station said that all planes in US airspace had been grounded. And my first thought was, “This is September, why is NPR doing a *War of the Worlds* spoof now?” But as I drove, and kept listening, I realized, it wasn't a joke.

That day changed us. It changed us as a nation. It changed us as individuals. Anyone who was alive and old enough to remember, knows they have been changed. Maybe only in a small way, or, maybe in a big way; but we have been changed. I don't know if any of you suffered any loss: loss of friends; loss of loved ones; loss of property or employment. We **all** have suffered loss of security. Too many of us have suffered loss.

What those men did was nothing short of an obscene act *Against* their faith; an obscene act against their holy scripture; an obscene act against their blessed prophet; and mainly an obscene act against their God. *They* were wrong, their acts were evil, they were misguided, and no matter how right they felt they were, their faith will never justify those actions. What we need to remember is that their actions were just that: their **own** actions. They were **not** the actions of a specific ethnicity. They were **not** the actions of a major world faith. They were the actions of a small, group of misguided individuals, who had been lied to and misled by someone they trusted to tell them truth. Instead of being filled with love, they allowed themselves to be filled with hate.

So this is my second thought for the sermon: In our first reading tonight, the apostle Paul, in writing to the young man Timothy, touches very briefly on his life before becoming a believer. He gave quite a litany there, did you catch it all?

I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. (1:13)

For those who don't remember, let me quickly recap. We learn back in the *Book of Acts*, chapter 8, that there was a man sent out by the Jewish religious leaders named Saul. He was sent specifically to seek out those who were fallen from the faith and now proclaiming this Jesus fellow as Messiah, as Lord. And because of his upbringing and parentage - a Jewish son of two faithful Jewish parents, first in his class, second to none - he was given privilege to deal with these (as he would see them) blasphemers in whatever way he felt appropriate. Usually that meant that he would simply have them arrested. Sometimes, however, he would get a crowd riled up against someone, and there would be a stoning. Which is what we read about in Acts 8. But then, while traveling to Damascus, Saul received a close encounter with Christ. From that blood soaked beginning, Saul, whose name was soon changed to Paul, became the most prolific author of the New Testament; he is considered to the unofficial replacement of the twelve apostles after Judas; he was instrumental in bringing the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles and throughout Asia. It took quite a bit of time for most of the followers of Jesus to trust him, that his conversion was sincere and not simply a ruse to gain their trust. He had to convince the Apostles of his seriousness. But once convinced, look out. Stand back and watch how Paul allowed God to use him. Paul, the one who once hunted down and prosecuted believers; the one who once visited violence on those with whom he disagreed.

And this is the third thought that I am going to try to bring into this message: This past Thursday I heard an interview on NPR with a fellow who has been working with the survivors of the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando back in June. Eddie Meltzer, a self-identified gay man, helped to act as translator for many of the families of the victims, English to Spanish, and Spanish to English. He had been at the nightclub, but left about five minutes before the shooter arrived. He lost five friends at the nightclub.

Eddie has since spoken out about what happened, and how many in the LGBTQ community have been, or are being, confronted and assaulted. According to the interview I heard, Eddie received a letter from a man of Muslim faith who wanted to meet with him. Eddie agreed to meet, in a public space, with lots of other people around. This Muslim gentleman explained how, at first, he had agreed with what the shooter had done. And then he had heard Eddie on the news show *All Things Considered*. Something hit him, and he realized he was full of hatred, and he didn't want that.

This Muslim man said to Eddie "we're not going to see each other eye to eye. I still don't agree with your lifestyle. But I have learned, through you, that I can respect it, and I have learned that I don't have to be consumed by hate."

At the end of the conversation, said Eddie, the man said something interesting. "The people who have hate will never win because they will always be consumed by their own hate, and that will destroy them. That's why good will always triumph, and that's the side that he wants to be on."

So to try to bring these three thoughts together, perhaps that's our lesson here. In Luke's story of the lost sheep, **love** is persistent in searching for the lost sheep. In that persistence, **love** finds the one who was lost.

Paul reminds us that it was the **love** of Christ that tracked him down, changed his life, drained out the hate, and replaced that hate with **love**.

Hate motivated those hijackers fifteen years ago to attempt to destroy that which they disagreed with. **Hate** pushed the Strand shooter to attempt to wipe out those who lead a lifestyle with which he disagreed. **Hate** drove Paul to attempt to rid his country of those who he felt were an abomination to his faith.

There will *always* be those who want to *hate* more than they want to *love*. There will always be those who want to harm what they don't agree with, rather than attempt to change a heart or mind. Those are the lost. Those are the ones who need the love of God, almost more than those of us who already know that love.

Remember those who are lost. And know that love is stronger than hate.

Amen.

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