

Today's theme - Looking Back & Looking Forward
September theme - Welcome Home

Look Back & Look Forward

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
September 11, 2011 Larry Moffet, senior pastor

Travelers will soon be able to keep shoes on through airport security. I've seen a lot of people having a hard time, hopping around, taking off shoes and putting them back on. I saw Moms with young kids having a hard time with the kids jumping around trying to put their shoes back on.

That's just one of the changes September 11, 2011 made on our lives. A more significant change is how 24-hour cable news channels hype us. An interview is on one part of the screen. A crawling caption or two is underneath it. Watch them all the time in case something bad happens. If not, they'll make something sound worse than it is.

Some of us are unaware how much harder it is for people from Canada and Mexico to come into the U.S. People from other countries, too, go through amazing difficulties and many more procedures to come to the U.S.

For me the days right after the tragedy were very different. I remember a sweet form of patriotism that was evident for about a month. Love of country embraced a kindness to others. That verse of America the Beautiful came alive for me: *America, America, God mend thine every flaw, confirm thy goal in self-control...*

In his book *Beyond Tolerance*, Gustav Niebuhr told many stories such as how neighbors in Seattle volunteered to help protect children in a Muslim day school. They came to the school and offered to stand on the busy street to protect students who had to cross it. Other kindnesses took place. Families contacted each other. Neighbors spoke. Strangers talked.

Maybe you, too, were moved too by the stories of Todd Beamer and his fellow passengers on flight 93 who averted a fourth disaster on 9/11, or by the priest who died praying with people who were dying at the World Trade Center, Michayl Judge, himself the son of immigrants.

I remember those stories and many more. When tempted to grumble about hopping around an airport security line in stocking feet, I coached myself to remember that anytime people reach out and sacrifice and share the best of themselves we stand on Holy Ground. I'm no better than Moses! Take off your shoes, Larry, and remember you are on holy ground.

Then we let the politics of fear take hold of us. I blame no one party or group. We let laws pass that allowed arresting and holding of even our own citizens for days without explaining where they were being held.

I can tell you that as a direct result of 2001's events, I started reading more about Islam. Learned about a man called Sayyid Qutb whose writings influence many people today, including leaders of the individuals who made the attacks of 2001.

Qutb outlined a vision for a world free from violence, greediness, ignorance, and sexual exploitation. Writing in the 50's and the 60's, Qutb was very critical of the governments of nations with Muslim majority. He also pointed to how self-absorbed and exploitive the cultures of Western Nations like the U.S. had become.

He claimed as a worthy goal the development of cultures which are non-exploitive. He said this would not happen through violence. Some of his followers forgot those parts of his powerful writings.

That's why we take a close look at the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew. The Lectionary Gospel reading for today could not be more apt. How can we forgive? How many times must we forgive? Why?

Peter wants to pin Jesus down. "Lord, I know you are preaching and living forgiveness, but let's set up some policy statements here. Is forgiving seven times enough?" We have to admit seven times is a lot.

I am grateful to the Transportation Safety Authority for working out a way for us to put our shoes on when we go through airport security.

It is as if in a modern day action parable, we are giving ourselves permission to put on an old truth:

Yes we are been on holy ground.

**Now is the time to put our shoes back on and move forward,
always remembering, and always embracing the future.**

Look back, AND Look Forward.

We need to carry in our hearts what both Jesus and Paul were telling us long time ago: The future is in Divine Hands, and so are we.

**Let every act of kindness, every hope that becomes real,
every act of hospitality, every way we help build a stronger
community, nation, world, every participation in God's Mission
be a way we both remember put our shoes on and move on.**

**WORSHIP SERVICES: SUNDAYS 8:30 & 10:45 AM
WITH ADULT AND CHILDREN'S BIBLE CLASSES AT 9:30 AM
2723 N. 50TH ST., LINCOLN, NEBRASKA
402-466-1906**

SECOND SCRIPTURE ROMANS 14:4, 7-9

Who are you to pass judgment 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...

⁷We 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.

⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again,
so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

GOSPEL SCRIPTURE MATTHEW 18:21-33

Reader 1: *A reading from the Gospel according to St. Matthew:*

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?”

²²Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, 77 times.

Pastor Jamie: ²³“For this reason the kingdom of heaven is like a king
who wished to settle accounts with his servants.

²⁴When he began the reckoning,

one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him;

²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold,

together with his wife and children and all his possessions,

and payment to be made. ²⁶So the servant fell on his knees before him,
saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’

²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that servant released him

and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same servant, as he went out,

came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii;

and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’

²⁹Then his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him,

‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’

³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison

until he would pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow servants saw

what had happened, they were greatly distressed,

and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.

Reader 1: ³²Then his lord called him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I
forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

**³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant,
as I had mercy on you??**