



©2022 Ginger Hertenstein Conley

SERMON TITLE: In These Trying Times: The Serenity Prayer, Pt. 1

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:13-23

DATE September 11, 2022

Online service at www.fpcd.org/live

Read also Genesis 3:1-11

Do you remember where you were on September 10, 2001?

September 10th was a Monday. I would have been at work, after taking my son to high school. He was a junior and running for class president. My two other children were away at college.

Do you remember where you were on September 10, 2001?

What about Tuesday, September 11, 2001? That morning I went to work earlier than usual—arriving at 7:00 a.m. to set up the Boardroom at Company Headquarters for a meeting. We turned on the TV to make the chore a little more entertaining. About 7:45 the broadcast was interrupted with a news flash of a plane hitting tower 1 (the North Tower) of the World Trade Center. Soon after, Tower 2 was struck.

VIDEO – “9-11 Sounds of Silence Tribute”¹

Just a year earlier I had stood on the plaza of the World Trade Center with my daughter, who was working there. We went up to the observation deck of Tower 2 to see the view of NYC.

What were you doing on September 11, 2001?

Southwest Airlines had procedures in place for an airplane disaster. But nothing like this! We were under attack! The Boardroom became an emergency Command Center; every employee involved to ground 190 airborne planes at the nearest airports. Every person spoke and moved with one purpose—to save lives of beloved employees and customers. People worked around the clock to then find transportation to return people to their homes.

The difference in September 10 and September 11 was astronomical.

On September 10th had you traveled, you would have arrived at the airport and walked to your gate freely. No baggage check. No search. No security. Your family could have walked to the gate with you. If you forgot something, anyone might have gotten on the plane and given it to you.

September 11th revealed enemies. Their attack that day affected air travel forever. Security checkpoints now. Saying goodbye at the curb instead of the gate now.

These things will never change. We have enemies who seek to destroy. We must never forget.

There's a day in the lives of the disciples that most likely, they never forgot. It was when Jesus first told them about the fact that he would suffer and die. Jesus had enemies. Let's read the story. READ Matthew 16:13-23

This is the first time that Jesus has told the disciples that he would suffer and die. You can imagine the shock.

Were not things looking up with Jesus?

Did not the miracles, the power (over health, nature, demons), the amazing sermons, the mass of followers mean that Israel's leader had arrived? Would not this put an end to Israel's subjection to Rome?

The disciples wanted Jesus to do things their way. *And he's going to die?*

Yes, Jesus has a powerful enemy.

Peter tried to change Jesus' announcement. Peter did not want to accept his plan and resisted Jesus. But Jesus said, “Get away from me Satan!”

Let's remember that this enemy has been attacking since Eden.

“One day the serpent asked the woman, ‘Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?’” (Gen 3:1)

Our enemy first causes us to doubt God.

Peter: “Heaven forbid, Lord! This will never happen to you!” (Mt 16:22)

That's doubt. But Jesus knew God does not operate this way. God tells us what his will is and also the consequences of breaking it. **This is our Security Checkpoint:** “Don't eat of that tree.”

Obedience means life. But “if you eat of it you shall die” (Gen 2:17). You know the story from Genesis.

Peter was resisting obedience. But Jesus said, “You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's.” (v. 23)

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vzMuYmBReE>

Peter was not going to be able to change God's plan.

There is a famous prayer written in 1937 by a theologian named Reinhold Niebuhr. It begins: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change."

We cannot change the fact that we live in a world where there exists an active, powerful enemy who often strikes deadly blows, which we experienced on this date 21 years ago. You may have experienced a powerful blow in your life. Perhaps something happened that you cannot change. You might be kicking against it years later. It might be affecting your life in ways you don't want it to. No one is immune.

The church has enemies that fight against it and endeavor to overthrow it. Jesus called it "the gates of hell." This is Satan's philosophy of life that puts together a plan that killed not only themselves, but destroyed buildings and everything else in a mile and a half radius.

Buildings were knocked down. Many lost their lives. But police and fireman saved the lives of 25,000 people in those very few minutes before the towers fell.

And the next day in the midst of that hell, a man who was between jobs worked tirelessly to pull three bodies from the rubble when he saw a heavenly symbol, a 17-foot-high cross made from a cross-section of steel beams. He recalled: "*I dropped to my knees in tears. It was a sign, a sign that God hadn't deserted us.*"²

It was also a call—turn to me and I will recover your loss. Think of your own loss. Hear those words; they call to you. "That loss you have suffered, I will recover, if you turn to me."

The man spray painted arrows on the ground pointing others to the cross which he called "God's House." Workers came, prayed, and wrote names of the dead under the words: "In God's Hands." A priest began serving communion to those workers.

A Priest blessed the cross: "Behold the glory of the cross at Ground Zero. This is our symbol of hope, our symbol of faith, our symbol of healing." Sunday worship at the cross grew from dozens to hundreds. On Good Friday 2002, they recounted the Stations of the Cross there. People began referring to those gathering believers as "like the earliest Christians." The cross's image appeared on knickknacks, lapel pins, posters, and tattoos. Soldiers wore pendants of the cross into battle in Iraq and Afghanistan. You can see the cross now in the 9-11 Museum.

Do you look for those special symbols of encouragement in your trying time? It will come in the midst of trouble. It will come when you most need it. "Turn to me and I will recover your loss."

The disciples watched Jesus as he worked in the midst of all those things we cannot change, but he can. **Who is he?** His words and ways are directly from God.

Jesus' way, which does not change, was to prevail over death. Jesus can do this RIGHT NOW, TODAY, in your circumstance. He can do this even in the death of relationships, losses, brokenness, ill health, redeeming them for his purposes.

In addition, he assures us, *turn to me, and one day you will LIVE in a kingdom where evil has been utterly defeated.*

Jesus asks you, "Who do your friends say that I am?" What would you answer? Do you know what your friends believe? Are you talking about him with others, inside and outside the church?

Jesus asks you, "Who do you say that I am?"

If you say, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" then you are in excellent hands.

There's a cross standing right in the middle of your life and you will not be defeated. And the gates of hell will not prevail against the name of Jesus Christ.

Let this be your rock today, in these trying times.

AMEN

² The Ground Zero Cross inspired people around the world as it was moved from site to site in Lower Manhattan, and finally at the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. See "Ground Zero cross a powerful symbol for 9/11 museum" by

Rick Hampson, USA TODAY, May 13, 2014,
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/05/13/911-ground-zero-museum-cross-world-trade-center/8907003/>, accessed September 8, 2022.