

## **“Bombs Bursting in Air”**

**John 11: 45-57**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

Smoke Rise Baptist Church

Stone Mountain, Georgia

August 31, 2003

### **Communion Devotion**

I cringed with pain and disappointment when I saw the flag draped coffin. Inside that coffin lay the body of one of the world’s brightest and best peacemakers, Sergio Vieira de Mello. He was sent by the United Nations to restore peace to Iraq and improve the quality of life for its citizens.

He was handpicked by Secretary General Kofi Annan for this mission because of his extraordinary abilities. Down in my heart, I believe he would have been the next leader of the UN. He was that gifted and respected among his peers. As a matter of fact, those that worked with him shed many tears over his passing. They cried openly and often. Annan said of him, “He was the one person in Iraq we could least afford to lose.”

Around 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, August 19, a suicide bomber drove a flat bed truck loaded with explosives close to the UN headquarters in the Canal Hotel in Baghdad. He strategically placed the truck at the corner of the building closest to the office of Vieira de Mello. There was no doubt that he was the main target of the bomber and that he knew where de Mello would be at that time of the day. This mission of madness succeeded as twenty-four people died in the blast, including this Brazilian born diplomat that was a master at diplomacy.

This latest bombing reminded me again that peacemaking is dangerous and helping others is risky. Often the rescuer becomes the victim.

This was certainly true for Jesus. He went to the outskirts of Jerusalem to resurrect his friend Lazarus, but did so knowing he would pay a high price. He knew he would never leave Judea alive. This act of compassion and power would be the last straw for the jealous and threatened religious leaders. They would see to it that he would be arrested and crucified, and they did.

Listen to the words of the Sanhedran, assembled to discuss Jesus’ fate. “ ‘What are we accomplishing?’ they asked. ‘Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’

Then one of them named Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year spoke up, ‘You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.’

He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for the nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life” John 11:47b-53.

So, why did Jesus go to Bethany and raise his dear friend from the dead? Why would he take such a high risk? Why would he walk into harms way? It had to be love, love for God, his friend and the whole world.

I’ve discovered something about love that explains why it is so powerful. Love is willing to do the difficult. Love is willing to take risks and throw caution to the wind, if

necessary. Love is willing to do what even fear or guilt will not do. It is willing to lay everything on the line for a noble cause or a person in need.

It was love for God that motivated Jesus to come to our world to show us who his Father is and teach us how to live. It was love for Lazarus and his sisters that compelled Jesus to go to Bethany at such a dangerous time. It was love for us that kept him from escaping the Garden of Gethsemane when the soldiers came searching for him. I'm not surprised, though, because love is willing to do the difficult.

What are you facing today that you would rather avoid? What do you need to do that is not going to be easy but will be good for you and others? What will enable you to do it? Love. As a matter of fact, the greater the challenge, the shorter the list of motivators. There are some challenges that respond only to love.

I have read that Vieira de Mello lived about thirty minutes trapped in the rubble after the explosion. His associates pleaded with him to hang on until they could rescue him. His final words were revealing. "Don't leave Iraq. Don't give up on the work or the people. Stay and finish the job we came to do."

That's our challenge today, too. As we gather around the table that reminds us of the ultimate sacrifice of another martyred peacemaker, let us ask for the love we need to do the difficult, to stay and finish the job we have been sent to do.