

“The Day America Cried”
Matthew 5:13-16
Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
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I was preaching a revival out of state the day of the Attack on America. I got up on that beautiful morning and went for a walk. When I returned, I turned the television on and could hardly believe what I saw. At first, I thought a plane accidentally crashed into one of the towers at the World Trade Center and wondered how it could have happened. Soon it became apparent that we were under attack.

Where were you on that fateful day when you got the news? I’m sure everyone remembers. This horrible day is seared in our minds much like the day a President died or the shuttle exploded.

It happened four years ago today, which is hard for me to believe. I appreciate the staff designing a worship service that takes this into consideration. The prayers, readings and hymns have inspired all of us.

As you would expect, I have given this sermon a lot of thought and prayer. I’m sure every preacher has that will stand in pulpits all across this land. **There are three things I want to encourage us to do through this message; remember those that died and their families that miss them, recognize the world is broken and all of us bear responsibility, and make a commitment to do our part to heal our land and God’s world.**

This is a painful day for all Americans, but especially those that lost loved ones in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. No doubt they are recalling final conversations and glimpses of family members that perished.

We embrace them today with our thoughts and prayers and ask the one who said, “Blessed are those that mourn for they will be comforted,” to be with them. On this day, we gladly help carry their burden.

T. S. Eliot wrote in his 1934 play, *The Rock*, “What life have you if you have not life together? There is no life that is not in community and no community that is not in praise to God.”

Today, of all days, let us embrace those whose sorrow exceeds measure and whose pain is indescribable. As God’s people, let us follow the advice and example of Henri Nouwen by taking an interest in the mystery and the mess of each other’s lives. This is, according to him, the most effective way to transform the world.

On this day, I encourage us to recognize that our world is broken and all of us bear responsibility. It was not a perfect America that Al-Qaida invaded.

No one loves and appreciates America more than I. I have traveled on foreign soil and have great respect for people of other cultures. I appreciate their contributions to society.

However, America is my home and I love her unashamedly. I am grateful for all the opportunities my country has provided me to live freely and pursue dreams. Having said this, I grieve over the sins of a privileged people, my own included.

I am impressed by the candor and courage of the Old Testament prophets. Their world was also broken and their beloved homeland was partly to blame.

Amos is one of my favorite prophets. This shepherd from the small village of Tekoa, twelve miles south of Jerusalem, spoke boldly to the people of the Northern Kingdom.

By the Eight Century, Israel had reached new political and military heights. Peace reigned and business was booming. Even religion was on the rise. Synagogues were full and so were the offering plates. It was the Golden Age in the Holy Land.

However, the exterior calm belied Israel's inner disease. Idolatry, extravagant indulgence, misplaced priorities, insensitivity to the poor and a corrupt judicial system ran beneath the surface.

Read Amos 5 and 8. You will be appalled, or at least I hope you will be when you read Amos' scathing indictment of his people. The scales in the marketplace were corrupt, prices were raised on the necessities of life for the poorest among them, kinfolk were sold into slavery because they could not pay small debts, exorbitant interest rates were charged to the poor, young girls were exploited, excessive drinking was common, judges were accepting bribes, treaties with other nations were broken and creative ways of seeking revenge against enemies were mastered.

Amos' call for repentance and social justice fell on deaf ears. No one in Israel wanted to look in a mirror. They only wanted the good times to roll.

"Let justice roll on like a river and righteousness like a never failing stream," Amos proclaimed, but no one listened. They ignored the fact that their society was built on plunder and inequity.

Is anyone listening to Amos today? Daniel Bell, Jr., writes in his article, *In War and Peace*, "Many churches have lost sight of the gift of confession, either practicing it infrequently or practicing it only in the most vague and abstract manner. If war is premised on the intention of justice and yet we know we are not pure in our intentions for justice, examination and confession become central to the practice of a just war. Only then can we avoid hypocrisy and injustice in our pursuit of justice."

Read the prophets. Every time the Israelites were attacked from without, they challenged people to look within. They wanted their tears of pain to be mingled with tears of sorrow for their own transgressions. May we accept their challenge today.

May we also make a commitment to do our part to heal our land and God's world. With God's help, we can do it. We can be salt and light, leading our world out of darkness and decay. It will require new ways of thinking and solving problems, but this, too, can be done.

Albert Einstein once observed that problems cannot be solved by using the same kind of thinking that created them. Another dimension is needed.

That dimension can be found, I believe, in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus told us that the desire for peace and justice must never be self-serving. As Augustine noted long ago, "Everyone desires peace. Wars are always fought for peace, for a peace that better suits the aggressor. It is not sufficient, then, to be for peace. One must intend a peace that is truly just and comprehensive." In other words, we must desire for our enemies, whom we refuse to hate, the same benefits of a just peace that we are pursuing.

"Teach us to love our enemies so that we don't become like them," my good friend Dr. Barry Howard wrote. Anger must never spill over into bitter hatred and uncontrolled revenge.

I miss Pope John Paul II. While I disagreed with some of his theology and decisions, I respected his sincerity and valued his wisdom. As religion professor Carol Zaleski wrote, "This vigorous, self-sacrificing, fundamentally joyful pope traveled the world proposing hope in Christ as the real answer to tyranny, defending the dispossessed, working to restore communion between the separate branches of the Christian family, transforming the relationship between Catholics and Jews and making a cogent case for the harmony of faith and reason. At the end of his life, he became the image of the Suffering Servant, bearing witness to the conviction that life is meaningful even at its moment of utmost weakness."

On this day filled with so many unpleasant memories, let us resolve to be a personal witness to the Gospel. Become salt and light in a decaying world groping to find its way.

I challenge every person here to be the presence of Christ at home, school, in the market place and neighborhood. Model the virtues of integrity, fairness, respect, inclusion, mercy, compassion, tolerance, loyalty, generosity, courage, love, humility and sacrifice.

You will need God's help and I assure you He is ready to grant it, especially on this Day of Remembrance. Call upon Him as we sing our hymn of commitment.

