



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

September 11th Remembrance

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

September 11, 2011, Evensong

The reading from the prophet Isaiah was chosen for the strength and depth of its promise. It offers an extravagant image of a world put right, but at the same time it also realistic. It doesn't ignore what has happened. It doesn't promise anything that cannot be achieved.

The prophet speaks God's promise to bind up the broken hearted – what a marvelous image – the fractured and scattered pieces of our hearts tenderly held together by the care and concern of so many communities, so that they could knit themselves back together in time. The comfort to those who mourn promised in Isaiah began with the global outpouring of solidarity and outrage as the awful story unfolded that September day. It continued with grieving families bonding together and in small moments throughout the years. And it will go on.

Jesus began his public ministry by reading this very passage. Speaking to an oppressed people, he proclaimed liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners. Jesus knew that oppression can breed hatred. Likewise, hatred can be manufactured by stereotyping and the manipulation of prejudices. The men who hijacked the planes had been convinced that the people working in the towers were somehow their enemies – that we are all their enemies. That kind of hatred has imprisoned the world for too long in a futile struggle that cannot be won.

Paradoxically, the ones with the power to tear down such prisons are those who have been wounded, the ones who have been wronged. Only when the aggrieved say, "we will not strike back in anger" will the world listen. And it all starts with forgiveness. In this morning's Gospel reading, the charge from Jesus was that we should learn to forgive again and again—in other words, forever.

Undoing hatred with forgiveness and love is the hardest work ahead of us. And that is why our spirits, faint and uneasy as we comprehend the full measure of this challenge, will be strengthened and encouraged. We will be given what we need. I'm not exactly sure whether Isaiah's "mantel of praise" is like a superhero's cape or an invisibility cloak, but it sounds like something good to have around our shoulders as we venture into the hearts of our enemies. For that is where we must go.

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Those who do such work are the oaks of righteousness. They are strong and powerful; they are the building material for the architecture of hope. Those who are able to venture into the hearts of their enemies and forgive can begin to rebuild the world, not as it was but as Jesus tells us it is to become. Jesus came to teach us about the power of love and how it can overcome darkness, hatred, and even death. He planted the seeds of a redeemed world in us. To realize that world will take the kind of courage that he showed as he walked to Calvary. He did it because he loved. He loved us; he loved God. He loved God's vision and was prepared to give himself up to see that it realized.

This vision is not new. It is as old as time, but it awaits our will to see it realized here on earth. From this moment on, may we start building toward that vision, not with the bricks of vengeance but with the mortar of radical forgiveness and the love of Christ. Imagine what such a place will be like. And imagine building it in the name of those we love but see no longer. It is the best way to remember them.

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