

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA September 11, 2011

Micah 7:18-20

A Special Tribute

*Hymns: 532 – 785 – 519 –
Closing: 333*

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Close your eyes and the images are instantly there; smoldering buildings, heaps of rubble, foundations laid bare, chaos like nothing seen before on American soil. 9/11 is close enough in the past that its terrible images remain seared into memories. As unbelievable as it was to see on that fateful morning ten years ago, it remains just as shocking to watch as footage has been replayed this past week. The slow motion descent of jet airliners crashing into the skyscrapers mesmerizes every time it plays on TV. The appeal that goes up every year is “Remember 9/11” as if we could ever forget any of those scenes. We remember where we were; we remember what we saw; we remember how we felt, first disbelief that the images could be real, then sadness thinking about the loss of life, later anger when we found out why it all occurred. There are so many troubling and terrible memories from 9/11. And yet, amazingly, it is not just bad memories that came out of that day. In the days and weeks coming out of 9/11 ten years ago, some of the most vivid memories for me are not of people running away in terror, but heroes forging on in bravery. They are not of people hiding in fear, but of Americans banding together in patriotism and unity like I have never seen. Never before in my life had a flag raised high in the wind elicited so much pride or an anthem before a football game welled up so many emotions. And as we remember 9/11 ten years later, it is not just the pain and sadness that the many documentaries and news stories recall and focus on, it is also the bravery and courage and dedication of heroes that is remembered.

In the current climate of economic depression, high jobless rates, and disapproval of the

government, how unlikely that remembering such a tragedy could somehow serve as a unifying point of pride? As you turn on the TV today, you will be met with a day of programming dedicated to salutes and tributes for those who sacrifice. As we think about sacrifice, we certainly salute and give thanks for police, firefighters, and paramedics, people who work day after day to serve and protect us here in our country. We also take time to salute the members of the armed forces, people who have fought and who continue to fight against enemies who want the events of 9/11 to happen on a daily basis. Let us take extra time on a day like today to pray for God’s protection and comfort to always be with them and their families. On this 10th anniversary of 9/11 terrorism and evil, there is plenty of good that is to be remembered in the many tributes that take place. And it is in the midst of all those tributes that I would like you to consider, “How is God viewed on 9/11 and ten years later on this day of remembrance?” The truth is that in the face of tragedy or disaster, tributes and thanks for God’s love and care are often difficult to find. Tragedy and disaster often bring God to the forefront, but not in a good way. So often, he becomes a target. Outraged people cry out, “How could a God of love allow this to happen?” Skeptics doubt whether God could really be in control if such tragedy occurs.

The devil certainly uses events like 9/11 to shake faith and cast doubts about God’s love and his ability to control all things. You can hear that attitude in interviews that are conducted; you can see it in shows titled, “Where was God on 9/11?” Even for Christians, those thoughts can run through our heads. As we remember the scenes of terror from NYC, it is easy to have a bit of anger well up; anger at the extremists who caused this to happen, anger at God for allowing so many to die, leaving thousands of spouses as widows, and leaving many more thousands of children to grow up without a parent. And it isn’t just at times of national tragedy that those doubts of God can come up. Perhaps you have had bouts of anger with God when a diagnosis of cancer comes in, or a longtime job has been terminated, or an accident has occurred, or something just hasn’t gone the way that you thought it should. Maybe you have had times when you have doubted God’s love; or his desire to answer prayer; or maybe even his ability to control all things. It isn’t just great tragedy that brings out those feelings, but everyday struggles. At the very least, there are times in life where praise and tribute to God is certainly not at the forefront of our list of priorities.

But on this day when so much of the focus will be on human heroes and human sacrifice, the prophet Micah gives us words that that are quite

fitting for a day like today. He reminds us that at all times, even in tragedy and disaster and personal conflicts, it is God who deserves our greatest tribute and praise.

You see, Micah knew tragedy and disaster. In fact, the scene he describes in chapter one of his book of prophecy could very well be used to describe the scenes of 9/11. Heaps of rubble, foundations laid bare, smoldering fires, weeping and wailing. Micah worked as a messenger of God at a time in Old Testament history when good times were few and far between. The disaster that Micah spoke about was the destruction of Samaria, the capital city of Israel. The ancient empire of Assyria was on the offensive and God was not going to stand in their way as they marched through Israel. At a time like that, it would've been easy for even the prophets of God to doubt what God was allowing to happen, if he had any control at all. The land of God's chosen people was becoming smaller and smaller as heathen countries expanded empires for their own glory. To the human eye, it appeared to be a foregone conclusion that very imminently, there would no longer be a nation through which the promised Savior might eventually come. There were undoubtedly many in Israel in those days who cried out the familiar questions, "How can our God allow this to happen? Does God have any control at all?" But the prophet Micah was not joining with the multitudes in asking those questions. Indeed, he voiced a question, but there was no doubt in what he asked. Instead, in the face of tragedy, Micah gives us a tremendous reminder of exactly who God is. In Micah 7, he says, ***"Who is God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago."***

In the face of tragedy, with destruction and disaster all around, Micah chose to focus on the unique love of God. Instead of joining his fellow countrymen in asking how God could allow evil to happen, he instead marveled at God's amazing decision to give forgiveness to sinful mankind. As chaos surrounded him, Micah chose to pay tribute to the God of steadfast and enduring love.

Micah could do that because he understood that what was happening before him would only result in physical pain and earthly loss. This destruction did not mean that God had backed out of any of his promises or become any less in control. This devastation did not mean that God had turned

from his love or abandoned his people. No, God was still going to fill his people's greatest need. He would hold to his promise and forgive sins through the work of Jesus Christ his Son. The destruction that happened in Micah's day was a reminder from God that the answers are not found in this world. They are found by relying completely on God and his incomparable love.

And what Micah remembered in tragedy is something that we often forget, isn't it? So often we forget that God owes us nothing. We forget what our sins and disobedience truly deserve. As we live in a country with so many blessings, we often forget that their presence is not the marker of God's love for us. Living in a land of peace and freedom is not how we tell if God is in control and carrying out all things according to his will. A life without pain or trouble is not the indicator of God being by our side. The amount of earthly blessings heaped upon us is not the gauge by which we decide how much praise we should give to God.

Instead, God's love is defined by how he deals with us and our sin. His control of all things is assured by the way he curtails every evil plan of the devil. His presence is guaranteed by the timelessness of his help. And that is what Micah wants us to remember today. Using beautiful imagery, Micah explains the greatness of God and what he has done for us. God has taken our sin and he has trampled it under foot. He has taken our errors and thrown them into the depths of the sea. He has removed them through the work of Jesus as he died on the cross. He has taken our eternal problem and given us an eternal solution and that makes his work incomparable. His work allows us to look at the worst of earthly situations in a completely different way. Even when evil strikes and rears its ugly head, we can give thanks to God, because we have been given so much from him. On a day of remembrance for all that happened and changed on 9/11, remember first and foremost all that God has allowed us to have and what he has given us to look forward to. On a day of tribute for all those who worked and fought as heroes on 9/11, give tribute first and foremost to a God who does something truly unique; he forgives sins, when so many are led by tragedy to ask, "What kind of God is this?" Be quick to respond like the prophet Micah. "He is a God that forgives sins. He is a God that delights in showing mercy and having compassion." He is God that is incomparable and he deserves all the praise. Amen.