

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today is the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Al Qaeda's attack on America.

As we watched, and heard stories of, the first responders

and their heroic response in this time of tragedy,

we as a nation came to see these everyday public servants in a new light.

And so this holiday of sorts has become a day to remember

not just all those who lost their lives on that tragic day,

but also those who continue their work.

Police, Fire, and EMTs

are the people we send into danger to protect and care for us.

They are the few that bear the risk for the rest of us;

the few that see the things no one should have to see.

They bear them for us.

And because they are only human like us, they sometimes break under the strain.

We all break sometimes.

Even with the best of intentions,

we seem compelled to mess things up.

And I'm not talking just about first responders,

I'm talking about all people.

We are all slaves to sin,

Wholly in need of salvation.

How sad it is, that it so often takes a tragedy to remind us of this fact

and to pry open our hearts to God and to each other.

Alas, that is too often the way with people.

Our lessons today speak to us of something different.

They speak to us of the ways of God.

In our reading from Exodus we hear something novel; that sin hurts God.

“I have seen this people, how stiff necked they are.

Now let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them  
and I may consume them.”

In these words we hear the pain that comes from a covenant broken;  
of steadfast loving-kindness rejected for a moments thrill.

Do not doubt that it is real pain.

Never doubt that our sin grieves God

In our psalm this morning we hear that sin also hurts people.

In this psalm we hear the voice of a sinner crying out to be made clean again.

A person like you or me suddenly aware of the depth of their sin.

Sin has a way of making us feel dirty or unclean.

Perhaps not in the midst of the sin,

but surely when it is exposed to others...

others we care for, or that care for us.

We want the pain and embarrassment to go away as quickly as possible.

Which one of us

has not at some time or another

found these words in their heart, if not on their tongue.

“Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

Our own sin is painful and difficult to face.

So much so, that we go to great lengths to deny or ignore it.

I have been watching with a breaking heart

as this dynamic plays out at a societal level.

Some in our country are trying to bury our past mistakes and sins,

denying them forbidding them from being taught in our schools,

as if that will make them go away.

If that were the end of the story we would be in peril; grave peril.

By the grace of God it is not.

For we have a remedy.

As the story from Exodus continues we hear another novel thing;

that God listens to, and indeed invites us into prayer.

Even in the midst of our sin we are summoned into the councils of God.

This is so stunning I feel compelled to say it again.

Even in the midst of our sin we are summoned into the councils of God.

We do not need to be worthy, our pure, or even good to treat with God.

Did you hear how God almost baits Moses,

“Go down at once for *your* people that *you* led out of Egypt  
have done a disgraceful thing.”

Both God and Moses know who really lead them,

and whose people they really are.

But God’s statement compels Moses to speak up.

By this example we are reminded that our own voice of prayer

is always invited into the mystery of Gods judgement.

Though it is not a necessary part,

it will always be welcomed,

always be heard.

We need only raise our voice in prayer

to participate the mystery of God’s saving action.

And so we see that we have an important role to play in the remedy to our sin,

as well as the sin of others.

But our remedy doesn’t end there, it only begins.

In Paul’s letter to Timothy our remedy is revealed in it’s completeness.

Though prayer can effect judgement,

without Christ there can be no redemption.

“The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance,

that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

This is a statement that many of us are familiar with in the Episcopal Church.

It's meaning is so obvious that it's easy to overlook.

Christ Jesus did not come to elevate the righteous,  
but to redeem the sinner.

And so it follows,

If you think you are righteous enough,  
you have no place with Jesus.

But if you know your sin,

can face it and accept it  
and take responsibility for it,

Jesus gives you the power to repent.

Like the woman who lost her silver coin,

Christ lights a lamp that you may see in truth,

And in that light Christ sweeps away the dirt

that separates you from the loving-kindness of God

searching carefully for the truth that lies deep within you,

and sets you free.

See also that God is not just looking for you,

but urgently looking for you,

sparing no expense to do it.

The story of the woman who lights a lamp

to search for a lost coin shows us these things,

if we are paying attention.

In a world where all the light we could ever need

is available at the flip of a switch,

it is easy to forget how precious light can be after sunset.

The woman does not wait until daylight

when there will be abundant light to aid in her search.

She must search now.

And so she lights a lamp

spending probably the most precious commodity in her house;

lamp oil,

Spending more on oil than she could recoup by finding the coin.

And still she rejoices when the coin is found.

Such is the irrational and inexhaustible love

that drives God's search for a relationship with you.

The Gospel tells us that

“there is joy in the presence of the angels of God

over one sinner who repents.”

One sinner.

Today, let that one sinner be you.

At our baptism we all take a vow,

and every time we are present at a baptism we all renew that vow,

to renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces that rebel against God.

We also vow to persevere in resisting evil

and whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord.

Not if. When!

Whenever we struggle to do this

we have the transforming power of love behind us,

lifting us up and changing us little by little

into the people God wants us to be.

When we fall instead into hatred, violence, or retribution

Satan has found an ally, not a foe.

I beg you please, as you make your way through life

never let the sins of another blind you

to the true nature of your own sin.

It is an all too easy trap to fall into.

We are all in need of redemption.

Desperately in need.

I ask you to remember one important principle:

While humans may fix problems, it is God who redeems messes.

And we are in a mess.

As we celebrate the 21st anniversary of the 9/11 attacks,

the world continues to be a very complicated and violent place,

despite our best efforts to try and ensure peace.

We have found that technology, wealth and generosity

are not enough to conquer evil.

They have never been enough, and they never will be.

I pray that we are finding out as well that making war on terrorists

isn't making terrorism go away.

There are still people who will choose to build their lives around hatred,

both inside and outside the United States.

And that is a mess,

It is something *we* cannot fix.

Those who seek to impose their power through evil means

will have to have their hearts and minds transformed.

Until that happens,

as the lesser of two evils,

they will have to be opposed with force.

We too will have to learn that the use of violence,

even in the best of causes,

does not make for a less violent world.

We are all in need of redemption.

Every one of us.

It is good that God's loving-kindness for us is so inexhaustible.

It is good that God searches for us so urgently.

If only we weren't so afraid to rely on God's grace.

If only we didn't hide so well in the dark.

“The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”  
Amen.