

Pentecost 17

Psalm 51:1-5,9,12 – September 11 & 12, 2016

15 years ago today, on a clear sunny morning in September of 2001, terrorists would hijack four planes from airports in the northeast part of our country. Two planes would be flown into the two world trade towers in New York City. The third plane would be flown into the Pentagon in Washington D.C. The fourth plane turned to head towards Washington D.C., when it was brought in Pennsylvania as passengers overpowered the terrorists on the flight deck. Nearly 3,000 people would lose their lives in the attacks, 6,000 people would be injured.

The events of that day changed life in the United States. Air travel would change. No longer could anyone go to the gates and watch planes. The Department of Homeland Security would be formed to tighten security measures in the United States. The Patriot Act would be drawn up to protect United States citizens. That single day changed many different things in our country.

Yet, that tragedy also brought out the best of people's compassion and mercy. An enormous amount of people volunteered across our country to help the victims of those attacks. Prayers were spoken. Collections were gathered. For a moment the world would pause with this incredible amount of mercy and compassion. Even though that compassion and mercy could not help families to bring back the people that were lost on that day, it had to be incredible to see and feel that kind of love and mercy from all the corners of the world.

In our text for this morning, David is looking for mercy and compassion not from the people who were around him as he was king. He was looking for mercy from the one he had hurt the most with his sin of murder and adultery – God himself. Some of the words of our text are very familiar. They are sung many times right after the sermon. They remind us of the mercy that only our God can give us. Let us take a look at these words of mercy in our text for this morning. As we do, we also can respond with the same words that David does: **“Restore to me the JOY of your salvation.”**

Sin has a way of bringing misery into our lives. David knew that what he had done was wrong. For over a year, David tried to hide his sin. It was awful. It was crushing him. He speaks about that guilt in another Psalm: **“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.”** He tried everything he could to try to relieve that weight of guilt. He tried to cover it up. Guilt is terrible. It can destroy people. It can be intense.

David expresses the intensity of that guilt with the words that he uses to describe sin. **“Transgression”** has the meaning of *rebellion, of breaking away from God*. Sin does not want to do what God wants. **“Iniquity”** – has the idea of *twisted*. Sin has a way of twisting the truth to make it look good. **“Sin”** has the idea of *“missing the mark.”* Sin causes us to miss the bullseye of God's law. Sin is terrible and it does terrible things to God's people.

Do you know what the worst part of sin is? David expresses it in our text: **“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.”** His sin wasn't just against Bathsheba or Uriah, it was against God. His sin was a gross ingratitude for the many blessings and privileges that God had given him. He wanted more. Instead of living a life that was a life of gratefulness to God. Sin takes all of that and throws God's will away. Sin didn't just hurt those around David, it hurt God!

How could those blood-stained hands of David become clean? In another verse of this Psalm David tells God what he wants: **“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.”**

David knew that they could not be made clean by his own action. He tried that. It didn't work. All it did was to bring fear. For those days after the attacks of September 11th, it brought fear into the hearts of people. It brought fear into the hearts of people who weren't even near New York City or Washington D.C. Because the question that was in the back of every one's mind was: *“what if...”* Families just wanted to be together.

David wanted to be together with his God. So, he prays: **“Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”**

Today it is pretty easy to wash clothes. Even I can do that. (I might not always get the colors sorted right.) At the time of David, clothes were not just washed in water, they were beat, they were banged against stones – anything to beat that dirt out of those clothes. All David wants is to be clean. He wants that guilt of sin removed, even if it had to be beaten out of him. He wanted that sin to be blotted out – not just with “white-on” on a typed manuscript. The only that David could see that blurred manuscript of his life blotted out was by God himself.

All David could see was God’s mercy and compassion. That is all that he needed to see. It is God’s mercy that makes crushed bones rejoice again. It brings joy and gladness back. That is what Jesus does for us. He takes all that bone-crushing guilt to the cross. He cleans us so that our whiter than snow. A cleaning that goes deep into our hearts. God turns his head away from our sins because they are gone and placed on Jesus. He restores us to joy.

The events of September 11th 15 years ago changed our world. The cross of Jesus changes everything for all eternity. May you and I rejoice with David: **“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”** Amen.