

Faith Matter **Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16**

Yesterday was the 20th anniversary of September 11. I believe you remember what has happened on that day. I was in Korea when I first saw the news about the terrorist attack. I didn't realize it was news but assumed this must be a part of a new movie because the scene of the attack was so unreal to be real. One World Trade Center has been rebuilt, but the pain of 9/11 has become a collective trauma of the United States, and it is still with generation. So please remember and pray for those who lost their lives and their family. Remember and pray for those who sacrificed their lives to save others.

Human condition

After 9/11, many things have changed. 9/11 attacked was the trigger to the outbreak of wars. It was also the trigger for fear and xenophobia. Hatred and distrust of strangers became a dominant emotion in our society. Generally, we don't trust strangers. We don't trust those who seem different from us. We don't trust others unconditionally. Perhaps, this is the human predicament, and 9/11 attacked has made it worse. We don't trust others until we discovered some trustworthiness in them.

This principle also applies to our relationship with God. We believe in God, but when we encounter challenges in life and witness human suffering in the world such as wars, the Covid-19 pandemic, hurricanes, we start to doubt God's faithfulness. When we don't see tangible signs of God's presence, we often become discouraged with carrying out God's mission.

Christians who received the Letter to the Hebrews also faced the same problem. Scholars believe that the Epistle to the Hebrews was sent to early Christian communities in Rome. They expected that Jesus would soon come again, so they devoted their entire lives to Christ while enduring a series of persecutions and public humiliations. But Jesus didn't come back as they expected. Their Christian family and friends were dying at the hands of persecutors. But they couldn't find any sign of Christ's coming. As their wait for Christ prolonged, these Christians were losing their hope for the coming of God's kin-dom.

I believe we often face the same struggle. On September 11, 2001, nearly 3,000 people lost their lives in the immediate attack on the World Trade Center. This tragedy triggered a cycle of vengeance and violence and the United States entered The War on Terror. For the past 20 years, more than nine-hundred thousand people have died in post-9/11 wars and 38 million people have been displaced as war refugees. The U.S government spend over 8 trillion dollars on wars.¹ I believe you have all seen the chaotic images at the Kabul airport in Afghanistan in recent weeks. Some desperate people clung to a U.S. military plane as it took off from the airport, and they fell to their deaths. Desperate mothers threw babies over airport barbed wire. When we face these human-made tragedies, we cannot help but ask 'where is God? what is God doing? Is God's peaceable kin-dom really coming or is it just a nice theological idea? Without any glimpse of a sign of Christ's coming, keeping our eyes on God's kin-dom is difficult.

However, according to Hebrews, what we need is not a visible sign, but faith in Christ's coming, even though there is no tangible evidence at all. In fact, faith is the proof. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (v.1) Faith enables us to see the coming of God's kin-dom, which is unseen and the assurance of things we hope for.

¹ <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/>

What we need is faith in God's kin-dom in which God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of family who lost their loved one by the horrible evil act of terrorism. God shall also wipe away all tears from the eyes of mothers who threw their babies over barbed wire to save them. God shall wipe away all tears of children who have witnessed the horror of violence and endured the fear of separation from their families. We need faith in God's coming kin-dom in which nations shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4) I know it sounds like a utopian dream. Some of us may think that this is not how the world works. But my friends, we are Christians, who believe in a new creation of the world and the final reconciliation of all people under God. Having faith in God's promise of final reconciliation keeps our flickering hope burning. Only those who have faith in God's promise can carry out God's mission for peace and reconciliation in the world.

Redeem the memory 9/11 through God's story

As September 11th approaches, people post on their social media things like "never forget 9/11." Yes. We have to remember victims and their families who are still affected by this tragedy. It's our responsibility to remember the police, firefighters, and soldiers who sacrificed their lives on that day to save others. We also have to remember how 9/11 has changed the world and has affected so many people's lives.

But simply remembering what happened on that day is not enough. We must think about how we remember it. Remembering is not neutral. Remembering is political and how we remember affects who we are and how we relate to others. How do we remember 9/11? With sorrow, despair, fear, anger. According to research, 9/11 caused an increase in islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims which still affects millions of Arab Americans' lives. It means that the way we remember 9/11 has not led toward healing and reconciliation.

We remember 9/11 so that we may all work together to prevent something like this tragic event from happening again. 20 years of the war has proven that war never brings peace and reconciliation. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." We need to remember 9/11 in order to dream together of building a peaceable world. To do that, we must redeem our memory by placing it into a larger story of God's salvation and reconciliation.

We don't trust or love others unconditionally. But God has shown God's unconditional love and trust in us through Jesus Christ. While we have failed, God has initiated reconciliation through Christ. With all of creation, we await our final and perfect transformation in the end of time. When Jesus returns, God's mission for reconciliation will be complete and people of every nation, tribe, and language, gathered as one, will worship the Lamb. And God will heal people and nations, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth and all things will be reconciled to God. (Romans 8:18-39, Revelation 7:9-17; 21-22:5). This is God's faithful promise. Our end is not a tragedy. There is still hope for ultimate reconciliation in God.

We believe God will fulfill God's promise of reconciliation. If we believe in this, we also have the task of proclaiming and working for reconciliation in this broken world. We must condemn all violent acts of terrorism. But we also must say 'no' to another cycle of revenge and violence, which is triggered by violent action. We witness that the power of forgiveness and love is stronger than the power of vengeance and hatred through Jesus Christ. Love is the only way to peace and reconciliation.

There is a door that cannot be forced open. Do you know which door it is? It is the door of the human heart. Through force, we may bend or break it, but the door of the human heart can never be forced open. The door of the human heart can only be opened from the inside. Love is the only way to open each other's hearts and create a loving community.

My friends, God has already started the final reconciliation of the world and invited us to do this ministry together. What we need is faith in God's promise. I believe that Asbury UMC can do this. With faith, let us tend the wound of our society affected by 9/11 and also try to be agents of healing and reconciliation. Amen.