

I've been really moved by all the coverage this weekend on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the attack on our country in New York, Washington, DC and the plane crash in Pennsylvania. It takes you right back to that awful day and its aftermath, doesn't it? I along with you, remember exactly where I was on that morning. I was standing in my kitchen making a cup of coffee and watching GMA when it all happened.

I was in seminary at the time. But it was a Tuesday. I didn't have classes on Tuesday/Thursdays. All the seminarians who were third-year students were encouraged to go down to NYC to be chaplains to the hundreds of people who wanted someone to talk to at St. Paul's Chapel. But I was a first year. I remember feeling powerless to do much, myself. I needed to return to classes. And all the profs in every class talked about, and led prayers for, the people who had died, were injured and those who were helping in the horrible recovery and clean-up.

It's been really sad to hear about how many firefighters, police, and volunteers who spent much time down at ground zero have died or are sick with terrible diseases. What an awful way to be thanked for the countless hours spent in searching, sifting, and just plain caring; wanting to help at that horrific time.

There are verses from the Bible that speak to terrible times. Because there have been too many terrible times in our history to count. One passage that sticks with me is: "*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed*" ([2 Corinthians 4:8-9](#))

There is nothing that we are going through now that people in ages past have not experienced before us. The Bible is witness to human joy, suffering, despair, elation, anger and sorrow. It's all there. And it's all helpful to us. We can be comforted by knowing that so many before us have been in a place such as this. And, at times it's frustrating to know that we are STILL in a place such as this.

God has spoken to God's people through it all. And God still speaks to us; through the Holy Spirit, through the words of Jesus and through the words we read in scripture. Sometimes we don't even realize we're quoting the Bible when we speak a common phrase.

What expression could be more ordinary than "*rise and shine?*" (*Isaiah 60:1*) Or how about "*That's just a drop in the bucket.*" (*Isaiah 40:15*) There are so many of these useful expressions of wisdom. We don't think about it twice when we quote them. "*There's nothing new under the sun*" we say. (*Ecclesiastes 1:9*) In Bible Study this week we came across one many are familiar with, "*How the mighty have fallen.*" (*2 Samuel 1:11*)

And today in our Gospel reading we have a very oft used phrase, usually said as one shakes one's head and sighs, "*Well, that's just my cross to bear.*" (*Mark 8:30*) (*but also in Matthew and Luke*)

But no matter how many expressions we use from the Bible can we say that we really know the Bible, the Word of God? If I were to ask you to tell me a Biblical passage that's important to you, could you do it?

This became an important thing to me when I was preparing for the funerals of our dear sisters this summer: Alice, Martha and Jacqueline. What passages were important to them? I knew a little from the talks I'd had with them. But I didn't know much. I should have asked more questions. We hear Bible passages every Sunday. And some of us read the Bible on the weekdays too. But what sticks with us? What endures in our hearts? Maybe a couple of stories stand out: Perhaps the story of the Good Samaritan, or the story of the Prodigal Son.

What are our own words to live by? Thinking back now perhaps a good Gospel reading for Alice Tweed could have been the feeding of the 5000. Oh my gosh she sure fed us over the years! Loaves and fishes we would remind each other. Loaves and fishes. A friend of mine in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous has always said that the story that means the most to him is that of the Prodigal Son.

Unfortunately, (and I think it's truly unfortunate) that with thousands and thousands of pages of beautiful text, what we only seem to remember at the time of a funeral is the iconic *John 14: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places."* It is part of the farewell speech of Jesus, meant to comfort them at a time when he is saying goodbye to his disciples. And that's a good thing. Absolutely!

But God gave us thousands of words to use in prayer, in services and in personal devotions. We aren't supposed to just keep those words on a shelf gathering dust. In the Letter of James today we hear that the tongue is a powerful small part of our bodies that can be used for good or ill. He compares it to a rudder on a boat which is very small in comparison to the size of the vessel. But what good is a rudder if there is no wind in the sails, or no gas in the tank to power the boat?

We listen to the Bible passages on Sunday, but can we speak any of them to others? Can we put some wind in the sails of our boat?

Jesus confronts Peter in today's passage from Mark but he's also asking you and me that question. The answer you give will tell you what about your faith guides you when you're perplexed, comforts you when you are grieving and lifts you up when you are walking out the door for the day's activities.

Who do you SAY that I am," Jesus asks us. If Mary's song, the Magnificat, is important to you then you might say that Jesus is the one who lifts up the lowly and fills them with good things. If one of the resurrection stories is your favorite passage, then Jesus for you is the one who saves us from death and despair and gives new life. If the Passover and Exodus are your passages, then you will answer Jesus by saying that Jesus is the One who frees us from captivity. Jesus is all these and many more.

Who is Jesus to you? Let's get that dusty Bible off the shelf at home. Or, let me give you a new one. Let's crack the book open and see what it has to say to you and me about who Jesus really is. And then, let's share who we are with each other reflected in the face of Jesus.