

The Rev. Cornel Barnett, D.Min.  
Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
September 11, 2011  
Romans 14:1-12  
Sermon and Litany  
Remembrance, Penitence and Hope

### Sermon, Part 1: Remembrance

The lectionary gospel text today fits today's commemoration of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. The text states: "Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord."

We honor the Lord every day and especially today. How best we honor God today is up to each of us. We are here because worship is important and integral to our lives today and every Sunday.

I was the interim pastor at Old First Presbyterian Church on Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, a few blocks from City Hall, on September 11, 2001. The church was packed with people standing in the side aisles on the Sunday after that fateful Tuesday. It was difficult to know what to say then and it remains difficult to know what to say 10 years later on this day.

Fortunately, I located a litany written by the Rev. Eileen W. Lindner & Rev. Marcel A. Welty from the National Council of Churches. It provides a prayerful response to what many in our nation are feeling at this time and guides the words of my sermon.

Along with the litany, the sermon is in three parts: Remembrance, penitence and hope.

Remembrance: My daughter Anna was a student at UC Santa Cruz for four years. Suellen and I spoke with her many times on the telephone, mostly in the evening. Once in those four years Anna called early one morning to tell us that she went for a walk on West Cliff Drive by the surfing point and lighthouse and everything was so perfect and beautiful that she just had to call to describe it. The sun had just risen, seagulls were in flight, schools of dolphin graced the waters and surfers rode perfect waves.

In the middle of her reverie another phone rang in the house. She asked me to hold on while she answered the phone. She took a long time to return. Eventually, she returned and told me with alarm that the call was from another parent who told her that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center Twin Tower in New York City and the building was ablaze and that another had just crashed into the next tower. "Turn on the TV!" she encouraged. We did and the rest is history.

*We light a candle in remembrance for all those who suffered and died on September 11, 2001, in New York, Pennsylvania and at the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia.*

*We light a candle to remember those who still live and who suffer because of the events of that day.*

Please turn to your four-page insert for the litany of remembrance. You respond with the bold typeface.

When we remember the stockbrokers, office workers, maintenance workers, bystanders, window-washers and all the others who worked together so valiantly to help each other, we can say together,

**We remember great courage.**

When we recall the firefighters who rushed upstairs as most everyone else was racing out, we can say together,

**We remember selfless service.**

When we recall the police officers who stood to protect and defend the people and performed their duties until the towers came crashing down on top of them, we can say together,

**We remember selfless sacrifice for the safety of others.**

When we recall the thousands of workers, women and men and, old and young, single and married, American-born and those born in countries around the world who did not escape the buildings, we can say together,

**We remember the loss of human life.**

When we recall those citizens who rushed to help, did all they could to help, we can say together,

**We remember and give thanks for dutiful commitment to those in distress.**

When we recall the people who stood in line at the nation's blood banks to make living donations from their very bodies, we can say together,

**We give thanks for those who live on to pass on life and love.**

When we remember the millions of Americans who gave so generously of their life and labor to endow funds to help the survivors and their families recover from their losses, we can say together,

**We are grateful for generosity.**

Remembrance begins with deep, personal identification.

**It begins with remembering the affliction of our brothers and sisters, and marking their pain as our own.**

Remembrance is a sacred moment

**when we raise up and hold to the light of the eternal moment, the good who have passed.**

Sermon, Part 2: Penitence

Penitence: We were in shock and numb for weeks after the events of the day. The nation was confused. A slew of events emerged in the years that followed. There is much to appreciate and much to be concerned about. I shall touch on three items.

Word came out that Arabs were responsible for the attacks and they belonged to a terrorist group called al Qaeda. The decade saw a rise in discrimination against Arabs and Muslims called "Islamophobia." The Confession of 1967 in our Book of Confessions states that God entrusts the church with reconciliation and to be agents of healing where people are separated from God and from each other.

National security focused on Iraq and Afghanistan as terrorist havens. They were bombed and attacked. Opinions for and against the war are strong on both sides. Whatever our opinion 10 years down the line we are dealing with many lost lives, thousands on our side and millions on theirs, torture, and massive expenditures which have virtually crippled our economy. Jesus blessed peacemakers and we must wonder how God views these conflicts and the results.

This week I watched features of 9/11 first responders who have grave respiratory illnesses and cancers contracted they say from working at ground zero after 9/11. They say they were misled by the EPA that claimed the air was clean when it wasn't.

Some of the events of this past decade make us proud like the tireless work of the first responders, medical personnel and truth seekers about the events of the day. Other events call us to penitence. The litany now calls us to confession and like all corporate confessions we can relate to all that is said or to portions of what is stated. We allow the Holy Spirit to work within us. We can however say it all because we are speaking as a corporate community with people across the nation.

*We light a candle, in penitence, recognizing that we have not done enough to address the sources of anger, hate, dehumanization, rage and indignation that lead to acts of violence*

Please return to your insert for the litany of penitence.

In our sadness, horror and shock we acknowledge that our own fears turned murderous and we have sought revenge, sometimes against even the innocent.

**We confess and regret our own anger and recognize its dangers to our spirits, our health, our community, and others.**

In the midst of the aftermath of the events of September 11th, 2001 we have been tempted to seek only our own good, hear only our own truth, acknowledge only our own suffering

**We know that peace will come to us and to our children only when the concerns of justice anywhere become the subject of political and social will everywhere, and that no justice leads to no peace**

In striving for national security and domestic peace we run the risk of confusing might for right and participating in the very behaviors we condemn

**Guard and guide our country that in our search for security we may not trample the rights of the innocent nor disregard the rule of law. Let us not confuse leadership within the global community as the voice for the whole community.**

Repentance means to turn away from wrong deeds.

**Repentance means choosing instead deeds which require moral restraint, and are more beneficial to all persons who suffer.**

Sermon, Part 3: Hope

Hope emerges more clearly when we honestly face the things that prevent us from moving forward – doing the kind of work we have just done in the “penitence.”

Eco-philosopher, Joanna Macy, stated this week that she was trying to get her head around what these wars are costing us. “Some estimates run to a trillion dollars a year which give a notion of the cost in money and decimated social programs. Such losses can be computed. But I don’t know how we figure the moral price we have paid. If we had the courage to look, there might be a way to estimate what this has done to our minds, our souls and our self-respect.”

Hope will come, she says, when the nation faces 9/11 in a way that encompasses a community wider than the US, in other words, when we affirm ourselves and everyone else with dignity and respect. This includes a sustainable earth. This reminds me of the psalm: “The earth is the Lords and the fullness thereof.”

*We light a candle to light the way to a better world for our children and our children's children, and all the children of God.*

Please return to your insert for the litany of hope and final unison prayer.

We recall with joy the unity we felt in the outpouring of help, kindness, thoughtful words and deeds from at home and around the world.

**We must hold firmly to our unity, borne forward now not of tragedy but of loving kindness.**

We place fresh confidence in international organizations and conversations that bring the diverse gifts of the world to the problems of poverty, injustice, terror and strife

**We long for wise policies that forego short term gain for long term stability, justice and peace.**

In a year filled with tragedy we dare to hope for an era yet to come in which the killing of innocents, greed, the ambitions of power, and cultural, racial and religious bigotries are but memories of a dim and unenlightened past.

Unison Prayer:

**God of the ages, before your eyes all empires rise and fall. Be near us in this age of terror and in these moments of remembrance. By your Spirit give rise in us to broad sympathy for all the peoples of your earth. Strengthen us to comfort those who mourn and work in large ways and small for those things that make for peace. Bless the people and leaders of this nation and all nations so that warfare, like slavery before it, may become only a historic memory. We pray in the strong name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.**

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Sermon: Rev. Cornel Barnett, Redwoods Presbyterian Church, Larkspur, California  
Liturgy: Rev. Eileen W. Lindner & Rev. Marcel A. Welty, National Council of Churches