

LET'S ROLL!
September 11, 2011 – Special 9-11 Service -- 2 Timothy 1:3-14
The Church of the Covenant

“Then the terrorists have won...” Remember that phrase that became almost clichéd after 9-11? Well, I am pretty sure I know who coined it –my dear sweet little Mother! On that fateful day, ten years ago, after it was clear what had happened and as there were news reports of a plane going down “somewhere in Western Pennsylvania” I desperately tried to be in contact with my parents. Evidently everyone in America decided to “call home” over the same two hour period of time because I couldn’t get through to them. I probably placed more than 20 phone calls and didn’t get through. Finally, one of my calls made it through and my Mother picked up the phone and said that she and my Dad were going to church. I suggested that perhaps they cancel for safety reasons. And my Mother summoned up a bit of umbrage over the phone, all that her 4’ 10” frame could muster, and she harrumphed –Stuart, we are the World War II generation. We know if we modify anything we do because what they have done then (and are you waiting for the line?) then, **THE TERRORISTS HAVE WON**. If we modify our schedule or our way of life or if we live our life in fear then (here it comes again) **THE TERRORISTS HAVE WON**.” And she concluded that I should do my duty to my church and that they were going to their church meeting, thank you very much, and then she hung up the phone on me. Click! I swear I think I heard that phrase first from my Mother!

So ten years later I want to ask the question –have the terrorists won? Have we overly modified our life? Do we lead our life in fear? Have they accomplished their goal of lessening the United States by taking an inherently optimistic people and turning us into fearful, craven cowards still nursing our wounds? Or have we moved on from 9-11? Have we been able to let go of it? Do we live our lives around some tragic event of the past or are we living our lives around a future hope and trust in the Living God? **HAVE THE TERRORISTS WON OR NOT TODAY?????**

Now I am not suggesting somehow we should forget the events of that day. I am most certainly not suggesting we forget the people who sacrificed their lives that day, first responders, firemen and police officers. I am not suggesting we forget those in our military who have nobly served before and on that day and since that day keeping terrorists at bay and engaged. Having 70 members of my congregation in the Pentagon when it was hit by terrorists changed me; smelling the acrid odor of burning jet plane fuel wafting over the church parking lot changed me, having the woman from my church explain how she was looking out her kitchen window, saw the plane come in low, and then heard a horrific thud changed me; serving a church, the closest Presbyterian Church to the Pentagon, and having the church windows rattle upon impact changed me; hearing the story from a man in my congregation who was supposed to be in his now vaporized office in the Pentagon but by the grace of God he was in a meeting on the other side of the massive building changed me; having to counsel the FBI agent in charge of sifting body parts at the Pentagon and hearing his graphic descriptions of the carnage changed me. Yes, I can never forget; I will always remember. It is right to do so. It is ennobling to the human spirit to remember people’s lives who sacrificed their life so others might

live. It is the central act of Christianity, when one thinks about it, One giving His life that others might live “*No greater love than this, that a man should give up his life for his friends*” I am not naïve any more. As a nation we are not naïve any more.

On 9-11 ten years ago today we remember the flight that crashed here in Western Pennsylvania near Shanksville. On Flight 93 some took matters into their own hands. I recommend the book, “Let’s Roll” by Lisa Beamer, husband of the man, Todd Beamer, who led the passengers to take on their captors on that fateful day, and crashed the plane into the ground right here in Western Pennsylvania rather than have it crash into another building and wreak havoc in Washington, DC. **By the way, did you happen to know that Todd Beamer was a strong Christian?** We didn’t hear that from the news media, did we? So why did they act? Why did they have courage where others did not? Why did they take on the terrorists when others did not?

They had **knowledge** –the marvels of the cell phone and of phones in every aisle of every aircraft meant that the passengers on Flight 93 knew what was happening; they were not dissuaded by the lies of the terrorists –just go along and be passive and everything will be OK. They knew; they set aside their naïve hopes that terrorists somehow might be good people; they knew because they heard what was happening in New York and Washington, DC. Knowledge gives courage to recognize evil. “*Ye shall know the truth.*”

They had **faith** –it was no accident that Todd Beamer prayed the Lord’s Prayer with the telephone operator before he led the charge into the cockpit. It was no accident that he led the passengers in the 23rd Psalm –“*Yea, though I may walk through the Valley of the Shadow of death, I will fear no evil...*” It was no accident, as his wife recounts, that he had just studied the Lord’s Prayer at his church and even in that moment, he was, in the words of the Lord’s Prayer, “*forgiving those who trespassed against us*”... Faith gives courage, not only to recognize evil but to do something about it.

They had their **families and loved ones** –they sacrificed themselves for the love of others; their own lives forfeit to save people’s lives they had never met. Self-sacrifice is indeed a religious instinct. In the film United Flight 93 there is that incongruous moment where the terrorists are praying, God is Great, and the passengers are praying the Lord’s Prayer –but only the one group was sacrificing themselves to save others; only one group did what they did out of compassion and love for people. Love for others gives courage to act to save others even at the cost of one’s own life. “*Perfect love casts out fear*” as the Bible says. (I John 4:18)

Knowledge, faith, family, loved ones, country, self-sacrifice –“*Greater love has no man than this; that he lay down his life for his friends...*” (John 15:13) Setting aside his fears, casting aside even his desire to see his family again Todd Beamer, strong Christian, set into motion events that still stir our souls. He sounded the trumpet charge, never calling retreat. And just before the passengers charged at their captors, as their last act on this earth, Todd Beamer shouted out –LET’S ROLL!

By contrast fear makes us stoppable. If we fear what may happen to us, we will not act. If we fear the consequences, we will not speak. If we fear the morrow we will not take action today. Fear is the very thing that silences the Christian; fear is the very thing that stops us from acting upon what we believe. “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.”

It is why our scripture for today tells us the very source of our courage. As it says: “*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity...*” God has not given us a spirit of fear and inaction and silence. But God has given us “*a spirit of power and love and self control.*” (2 Timothy 1:7) God has given us a spirit of power; God has given us the Holy Spirit within our hearts and within our lives. We are living temples, living sanctuaries, of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit has taken up residence within us through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is that Holy Spirit dwelling within us that gives us the courage to act, the power to speak, the love to stand up and do something about it when others remain passive and seated and in denial. “*Guard the truth*” that has been entrusted to you, urges the Apostle Paul (v. 14); Be not “*ashamed*” in who you believe in, beloved, say with the Apostle, “*for I know whom I have believed*” (v. 12); for it is Christ Jesus “*who abolished death and brought life and immortality to life through the gospel*” (v. 10); “*Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord*” (v. 8); do not be silent when we should speak; do not hesitate when we should act; do not remain seated when we should stand; for we have been given a spirit of power in the Lord Jesus Christ that overcomes our every fear. LET’S ROLL! says the Spirit; LET’S ROLL! “Remain seated” whispers the spirit of timidity and fear. “LET’S ROLL” shouts the voice of the Spirit!

So it is high time to let go of the past and let’s roll into a future filled with certainly, assurance, hope and no fear. It is time to stand up and move on. It is time to live our lives in the same spirit as those who gave their lives, in knowledge, in faith and for the love of others. We dishonor them if we do not live as they lived, courageously. Indeed we do forget them if we live our lives in fear of what might be. The terrorists have not won. The resilient spirit of the American people has won. The God who dwells within us has won. The principles of freedom and dignity and attempting to have a world where there is not fear and violence has won. For the battle may I say really rages within the human heart. If we fear then the devil has won. If we hate then the devil has won. If we remain cemented into place in fear then the devil has won. If we cannot move on then the devil has won. The terrorists have not won; evil has not won. Thanks be unto God who gives us the internal, *spiritual* victory through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

A while back I went out with some dear friends to visit the site of the crash of United Flight 93. It is in a vast and broad open field, like so many here in Western Pennsylvania, unremarkable except for the act of courage that took place there ten years ago. There is a hushed tone as people gather at a distance from the site; there are banners that people have made; religious trinkets people have left; one was a medallion on which was etched the words of the 23rd Psalm, the very Psalm Todd Beamer led the passengers in before he shouted, LET’S ROLL.

The movie United Flight 93 has this interesting, enigmatic scene of the terrorists reciting Allahu Akbar, God is Great, while simultaneously out in the cabin the passengers are

reciting scripture. Envision that scene as this sermon concludes. *“The Lord is my shepherd”* say the passengers; *“Allahu Akbar”*, say the terrorists. *“I shall not want”* – *“Allahu Akbar”*. *“He leadeth me in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters”*; *“Allahu Akbar”*. *“He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”* *“Allahu Akbar”*. *“Yea, though I may walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil”* *“Allahu Akbar”* *“For thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me, Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies, Thou annointest my head with oil.”* *“Allahu Akbar”*. *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”* *“Allahu Akbar”* *“And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*

I will fear no evil; I will fear no evil. For THOU art with me. It is the gift given to us on 9-11 by people of courage and faith. Beloved it is time to stand and to speak. It is time to believe and to trust. For the Lord has not given us a spirit of timidity...but a spirit of power.

Let’s roll, America! LET’S ROLL! Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*