



1506 Orchard Terrace
Linden, NJ 07036-3807
Office: 908.486.3073
Fax: 908.486.3079
www.lindenpres.org

Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
Manse: 908.925.4939

Sermon for Patriots' Day, Sunday, September 11, 2011

Sermon Texts: II Samuel 19: 16-23
Matthew 5: 38-44
Matthew 18: 21-22
Romans 12: 9-21

Sermon Title: "Overshadowed"

Sermon Topic: Our duties as Christians

Sermon Purpose: To teach that our love for those who have been taken from us needs to be directed away from grief, after a while, and directed toward teaching people how to love, how to share the knowledge of the right, and how to forgive.

.....
Sermon Prayer: O God, Whose love reigns supreme in the world: mediate Your message to us this hour, that we may know Your will and be able to love You with our whole heart, mind, and strength; through Christ, Who intercedes on our behalf and Who bestows upon us His marvelous grace. Amen.

Because today is Rally Day, and the anniversary of the events of September 11, 2001, as well as the beginning of our new program year, there are many emotions going through us, today. We **want** to honor the victims of what happened on that Tuesday morning, ten years ago, but we also **need** to look **past** that, remember other things that happened that day, and move forward.

We remember that day as the day **Ray Eriksen** gained his crown of glory after battling with cancer. Yes, it was the day we lost **Wanda Green**, and so many others were taken from our nation, but it is also **Rick Ruppel's** birthday. We remember that day as the day little **Nellie Clark** not only joined Mom, Dad, and Sam, but also became part of a much larger family of aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, great-grandmother, and the church family at LPC.

You see, we can either continue to bury **Wanda** and **Ray**, and in doing so continue to bring pain to their families, or we can move forward. We **will remember** those individuals, and we thank God for the gifts they shared with us. Let's **use** those gifts of fellowship, friendship, enthusiasm, conscientiousness, perseverance, and commitment to build and strengthen a community of believers in this congregation that they served. Let's allow the love we received **from** them to grow and be shared with others, just as the love and teachings of our Lord Jesus was shared with His disciples and other followers. **Those** gifts grew as the church grew, becoming the basis for one of the major faiths of our world, lasting for centuries.

For several months, now, I have known this day was coming and I would have to preach on forgiveness on the anniversary of 9/11. Consequently, I have been working through some issues that have been preying on me – as your pastor. It's time I share with you my struggle as I wrestle with the issues of the flesh and issues of the faith.

When Jesus came to earth, old laws were changed. He taught that "an eye for an eye, and a



tooth for a tooth” were not to be followed, any longer. Instead, He taught compassion. If a person hits you, offer no resistance. If someone wants your shirt, give your coat, as well. If anyone orders you to go a mile with him/her, go the second mile – **without hatred**.

Here’s where I have a real problem with being a Christian. You see; I **can** forgive someone who has made remarks about **me** or about my **integrity**. Oh, it **hurts** (particularly when that person is **supposed** to be a friend)! But, I figure it’s simply because we don’t **really know** each other as well as I had supposed, or it’s because they haven’t seen the situation from **my** perspective. I figure time will prove one of us right and the other wrong, apologies may be made, and then we can move on. I can forgive comments made in **anger**: comments **made**, but maybe not **meant**. As a Christian, as a pastor, and as I have gotten older, I have learned to rise **above my** hurt and **my** anger to see the situation from as many sides as possible – and to forgive certain comments or actions.

But, when it comes to events like we Americans have endured recently, I have a real **problem** with **forgiveness**. Yes, I see deaths resulting from military actions as a hazard of war as the risk of being a member of the military. (They are regrettable and painful, but they are the risks of being in the military.) It’s difficult to deal with, but it is still the perspective of “the casualties of war.”

9/11, however, was different! So were the atrocities committed against American civilian construction workers in Iraq, or the deaths of children on the streets. So were so many other senseless acts that have taken lives and have not only diminished individual families, but have also diminished the **human** family.

Yet these words ring in my ears, “Don’t **hate** your enemies; **love** them!” That’s a hard pill to swallow! Maybe forgiveness **should** be left to kings, as it was in the Old Testament. Maybe I’m just too much of a “common man” to be **able** to forgive.

Oh, I can forgive if it involves someone “out there”; someone I don’t really **know**. I can even forgive when it hurts **me, directly**. But, when it involves my **family, that’s** a different story. Forgiveness will have to wait until the heat of my **anger** and my **hatred**, and the pain of **betrayal**, can be assuaged.

The woman who forgave the teenaged boy for throwing the frozen turkey off a bridge and smashing her windshield, causing her years of reconstructive facial surgery and pain; that’s **one** thing. The couple asked for forgiveness from **another** teenager who stood on an overpass and threw a bowling ball through their windshield, landing in the backseat of their car, killing their infant child strapped into his car seat; **that’s** quite **another**.

But then, Jesus’ words come back to my ears. “If you have an enemy, there is the beginning of hatred. If hatred is added to hatred – like gasoline to a fire, it explodes violently. If love is pitted against hatred, that **love** has enough power to **conquer**. Using that power, you can **prove** the strength of God to conquer, **through you**. You become more powerful than the evil that surrounds you.”

Later, Peter asked Jesus how often a person should be forgiven. The answer was “seventy times seven.”

Jesus did **not** mean any specific number of times. He didn’t mean that everyone was to carry around a “clicker” in order to keep a tally. He didn’t expect us to spend our lives calculating ... “Let’s see, now. That’s four times that I’ve forgiven Hepzibah; twice for Herb; six times for Martin; and ...” He didn’t mean seventy-seven or seventy times seven (490). He meant, as many times as the **need to be** forgiven exists!

Paul’s words to the Romans also come as a message for us, today. He said to love one another, hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good. In other words, we are to hate the **sin**, but love the **sinner** and heed the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (That’s part of what we’re doing when we remember the gifts we received from those who are no longer with us and use those gifts to promote Christ’s kingdom. We are celebrating the life and the love we share through Jesus Christ; both **from** those who are gone and **with** those who surround us.)

This is what we must do with the **many** situations facing us. We must love the person all the more. We must pray for that person (or those people) and ask God’s Holy Spirit to come upon them and show them their wrongdoing, and then (when they come before us – as Shimei came before King David) we must allow ourselves to be guided by that **same** Holy Spirit to find it in our hearts to forgive.



Yes, I can tell you from personal experience that it **is difficult**, but it also proves to **us** the power of love. When the person realizes the mistake and asks for forgiveness, it is our duty to forgive.

How do we do that? Read Paul's words to the Romans: "Let love be genuine." "Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; ... Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ... Repay no one evil for evil, ... never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; ... Do not be overcome **by** evil, but **overcome** evil with **good**."

In other words, love your enemies until all **but** love is lost. Teach the love of Christ and guide the wayward in love. Show sin for what it is, and when asked for forgiveness, offer it readily.

Christ was sent to earth to show God's love for us. He was ready to forgive all who came seeking forgiveness. It may take quite a while until our enemies seek that forgiveness. It may take quite a while before we can find any sense of forgiveness way down deep in our hearts. But when it happens, we are called upon – as Christians – to offer it freely.

Are we any better than Christ that we can take vengeance and condemn those who repent their sins? **NO!** We must love our enemies, until the end of forever.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, guide us in Your Spirit that we may truly be called followers of Your Son. Help us to do what must be done and lead us in the search and the conquest of the sins of our world about us. Make examples of us, that through our lives we may lead others into your loving arms. In the name of your dear Son, we pray. Amen.