

Remembering September 11, Praying for Peace

Eleven Days of Prayer

This year we will observe the fifteenth anniversary of the events of September 11, 2011—when terrorist attacks on New York and Washington D.C. killed thousands and precipitated a “War on Terror” that has now spanned more than a decade and circled the globe. As it happens, this fifteenth anniversary falls on a Sunday. How will your congregation mark this tragic event and seek the peace of Christ in the world?

Romans 12:9-21—offers an excellent resource for reflection and a profound opportunity for prayer as we approach this significant anniversary. This passage from Paul’s letter to the church at Rome sets forth the parameters for Christian life in a time of fear and violence, hatred and persecution. It also offers a compelling model for faithful Christian witness and response in our own day—a time no less fraught with conflict, anxiety, and suspicion among neighbors and nations.

The materials provided here are designed to promote and accompany an eleven-day “season of prayer” around Romans 12:9-21 in preparation for the fifteenth anniversary of September 11. Pastors might announce this opportunity for prayer on (or better yet, before) August 28, perhaps in connection with the proclamation of the Word. Those who wish to engage in this time of prayer are invited to meditate on the verses below—along with accompanying prompts for reflection and ideas for action—on the eleven days leading up to September 11, 2016. A brief prayer is provided for each day.

Thursday, September 1, 2016

SCRIPTURE

Let love be genuine;
hate what is evil,
hold fast to what is good.
(Romans 12:9)

REFLECTION

- Jesus commanded us to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). What does it look like when we love our neighbors with “genuine” love?
- How are Christians called to respond to genuine evil? What does it mean to hate evil—even as we seek to love our neighbors?
- What do you “hold fast” to? What are the good things Paul is talking about here?

ACTION

- Read today’s newspaper (online or in print) or watch or listen to a broadcast of the news. While you are doing this, make a list with three columns: (1) things that are good (worth holding fast), (2) things that are evil, and (3) examples of genuine love.

PRAYER

Loving God,
with faithfulness you hold us fast,
even in times of evil and fear.
Help us to love as you love
and to seek the good that you desire;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Friday, September 2, 2016

SCRIPTURE

Love one another with mutual affection;
outdo one another in showing honor.
(Romans 12:10)

REFLECTION

- Jesus said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). How might we, as the church, become a community of people known in the world by our love?
- What makes for “mutual affection”? What does this kind of love require?
- How do you show honor to another person—particularly a person who holds different values and beliefs, or with whom you may disagree?

ACTION

- Go out of your way to show honor to someone who may be despised or unloved, or with whom you have strong differences of opinion or belief.

PRAYER

God of all honor and glory,
who are we that you are mindful of us?
Yet you have made us all in your image
and have crowned us with glory and honor.
Teach us to honor one another
as the work of your hands
and the breath of your Spirit—
all for your glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Saturday, September 3, 2016

SCRIPTURE

Do not lag in zeal,
be ardent in spirit,
serve the Lord.
Rejoice in hope,
be patient in suffering,
persevere in prayer.
(Romans 12:11-12)

REFLECTION

- How do you show your zeal for God—your ardent spirit—in the practice of your faith? What does that have to do with serving the Lord?
- What are your hopes for the world—particularly with respect to peace and reconciliation among neighbors and nations?
- Think of a time when prayer helped you to persevere and have patience through suffering, conflict, or anxiety. How did prayer make a difference?

ACTION

- Make a collage or write a poem or prayer expressing your hopes for peace in the world.
- Spend some time praying for someone in particular who is suffering; this may be someone you know personally or a person (or group of people) you have heard about.

PRAYER

God our hope,
you are our strength in times of suffering,
never far from those who call on your name.
Give us your peace that passes understanding,
the joy that comes from serving you,
and the life that death cannot destroy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sunday, September 4, 2016

SCRIPTURE

Contribute to the needs of the saints;
extend hospitality to strangers.
Bless those who persecute you;
bless and do not curse them.
(Romans 12:13-14)

REFLECTION

- Who are the “saints” you have encountered in life? Who are the “strangers”?
- In what ways does your congregation “contribute to the needs of the saints” and “extend hospitality to strangers”? How might you enhance or expand these ministries?
- Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). What might it mean to “bless those who persecute you”?

ACTION

- Make a contribution to a charitable organization, or find another way to serve someone in need.
- Seek out an opportunity to show hospitality or welcome to a stranger—particularly someone from another culture or country.

PRAYER

God of every blessing,
you have claimed us as your own
and provide for our needs
with the abundance of your grace.
Open our hearts and hands
to provide for the needs of others
and to welcome the lost and the least;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Monday, September 5, 2016

SCRIPTURE

Rejoice with those who rejoice,
weep with those who weep.
(Romans 12:15)

REFLECTION

- As we approach the fifteenth anniversary of September 11, 2001, how might we “weep with” those who are still grieving this tragic event?
- Looking back over the past fifteen years in the life of our nation and world, for what do we give thanks and rejoice? Where have you seen God’s saving or reconciling work?
- Are there times when rejoicing may not be appropriate, or contrary to the demands of the gospel? Should we rejoice at the death of an enemy?

ACTION

- Offer prayers of thanksgiving for those who risked or gave their lives to rescue others on September 11, 2001; for those who have served their country in subsequent conflicts; for those who work for peace in the world.
- Offer prayers of intercession for those who lost loved ones on September 11, 2001, or in the armed conflicts in that followed.

PRAYER

God of compassion,
you know our triumphs and struggles,
the heights and depths of human life.
Hold us in your heart
through times of sorrow and joy
and help us to uphold one another;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Tuesday, September 6, 2016

SCRIPTURE

Live in harmony with one another;
do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;
do not claim to be wiser than you are.
(Romans 12:16)

REFLECTION

- What does it mean to “live in harmony”? When have you experienced people of different faiths or divergent worldviews living in harmony with one another?
- Who are “the lowly” in your community, or in the larger world? Why is it important to “associate with the lowly”?
- Where have you seen examples of real wisdom in the response to September 11, and in subsequent events?

ACTION

- Read an article or book or watch a documentary about another culture or faith. Try to learn more—and challenge your own assumptions—about another group of people.

PRAYER

God most high,
you lift up the poor and lowly,
scatter the plans of the proud,
and confound the wisdom of the world.
Help us to live in harmony with one another
and with your whole creation,
joining our voices with the song of saints and angels;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Wednesday, September 7, 2016

SCRIPTURE

Do not repay anyone evil for evil,
but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
(Romans 12:17)

REFLECTION

- In response to the adage “an eye for an eye,” Jesus said, “Do not resist an evildoer” (Matthew 5:38). What does this mean?
- Is there such thing as “necessary evil”? Are there times when a terrible sacrifice might be necessitated by a greater good?
- What do you think Paul had in mind by “what is noble in the sight of all”? Where have you witnessed great nobility or moral character?

ACTION

- Find an opportunity to resist the temptation to “repay ... evil for evil,” or counsel someone else to do the same.
- Look for an opportunity to lift up, celebrate, and give thanks for something that is “noble in the sight of all.”

PRAYER

Gracious God,
out of your great love for the world
you sent your only Son to save us.
Teach us to give ourselves for others,
freely and without reserve,
so that all may know your saving love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thursday, September 8, 2016

SCRIPTURE

If it is possible,
so far as it depends on you,
live peaceably with all.
(Romans 12:18)

REFLECTION

- How do you seek to “live peaceably with all”? Where is there conflict in your life and relationships? Where is there the need for reconciliation?
- In what sense do you bear responsibility or share accountability for war and violence?
- What actions might you take to promote peace and reconciliation in your community or in the larger world?

ACTION

- Make a list of places in the world (including places in our own nation) that are beset by violence and conflict. Pray by name for these situations and the people they affect over the coming days or weeks.
- Write a letter to your senator or congressional representative expressing your hopes or desires for peace in a particular situation of conflict or war.

PRAYER

God of peace,
we know that all things are possible
for those who trust in you.
Show us the things that make for peace
and teach us—like the lion and lamb—
the ways of your peaceable kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Friday, September 9, 2016

SCRIPTURE

Beloved, never avenge yourselves,
but leave room for the wrath of God;
for it is written,
"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."
(Romans 12:19)

REFLECTION

- Think about the events that followed September 11, 2001—the global “War on Terror.” To what extent were these actions and decisions fueled by a desire for vengeance?
- What does it mean to “leave room for the wrath of God”?
- Do you believe that God exercises “vengeance”? When and in what way does God answer or repay evil or wrongdoing?

ACTION

- Think of a time when you have tried (or wanted to) to “get even” for a wrong that was done to you. Or think of a time when someone sought to get even with you because of a wrong you had done. Pray for God’s forgiveness and the grace to forgive. If possible, seek out reconciliation with that person.

PRAYER

Almighty, all-merciful God,
we give thanks that you are slow to anger
and abounding in steadfast love.
Teach us not to strike out with wrath and rage,
but to trust your judgment in all things.
Come quickly to bring justice to our troubled world,
and make us ready for the peace of your eternal realm;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Saturday, September 10, 2016

SCRIPTURE

If your enemies are hungry, feed them;
if they are thirsty, give them something to drink;
for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.
(Romans 12:20)

REFLECTION

- What effect does it have to respond to enemies with kindness—to give them food and drink?
- What impact might this have as a foreign policy? Where have you witnessed examples of such an approach in the years since September 11, 2001?
- In what sense do such actions “heap burning coals” on the heads of enemies? What does this phrase mean anyway? (See also Proverbs 25:21-22).

ACTION

- Think of someone with whom you have unresolved conflict. Make plans to share a meal with that person, if possible, or extend some other gesture of kindness and reconciliation.
- Make a contribution to an organization that seeks to provide food, shelter, or medical aid to people in a place that has been ravaged by war.

PRAYER

Generous God,
we remember how Christ shared bread and wine
even with the ones who would deny and betray him.
Strengthen us to love and serve others
with true compassion and Christ-like humility,
until the day when all are reconciled
at your heavenly banquet table;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sunday, September 11, 2016

SCRIPTURE

Do not be overcome by evil,
but overcome evil with good.
(Romans 12:21)

REFLECTION

- How is it possible not to be overcome by evil? How might you or your congregation develop or nurture this capacity?
- How is it possible to overcome evil with good? How might you or your congregation develop or nurture this capacity?
- Where have you seen examples of people, communities, or organizations, by the grace of God, overcoming evil with good—particularly in response to September 11, 2001?

ACTION

- In some small way, try to respond to something evil with an act of goodness, generosity, and genuine love. Let this be a practice that takes root in your life, not only this day, but every day!

PRAYER

God of all goodness,
we rejoice that you have already overcome
the powers of sin and death
through the dying and rising of Christ our Savior.
By the grace you have given us in Baptism,
help us, day by day,
to die more and more to sin
and live more and more to your glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.