

Jack's and my beautiful granddaughters, Brielle Elizabeth and Cameron Ellen entered the world this morning! And we are feeling so blessed. I am heading down to Connecticut tomorrow, but will have my cell phone [207-837-1620](tel:207-837-1620) and my email: [jackbethhood@tidewater.net](mailto:jackbethhood@tidewater.net)

Betsy Graves has asked for prayers for Nick Thibedeau, a young man whose life is just beginning and is facing a huge challenge. Prayers for healing and for his family.

Sunday we lit the Memorial candle for all those lost on 9/11. And we kept in prayer: Bobby Eugley, Kathy Norwood, Amy Lincoln Sykes, Allison Kelsey Bryant, Janet Claar, Betty House, Geri Kelsey, Sheila Callahan, Bob and Diana Haughs. It was wonderful to have Steve Busch back with a first-hand report on Sally who is steadily, but slowly improving.

Aban Zirikly who has applied for the position of Music Director joined us. He sang with the choir and played the postlude. Judy is generously filling in and will be here next week, but Aban will play Sept. 25. Please come and share your input.

Norman has replaced a board on the church deck and Donna has begun scraping the benches and railing. Donna has left the scraper inside the door on the right if your daily walk happens to take you by there. Many hands make light work!

Yesterday was a powerful morning! Norman rang the church bells at 8:46 and provided fireman's gear for the altar. I had a sermon prepared, but fed by the strong emotion of the morning and the congregation, I went off script several times. I will try to add the changes. And thank you all for all you gave to me yesterday!

HEBREW BIBLE	Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28	Charlie Hughes
EPISTLE	1 Timothy 1:12-17	Barbara Hughes
GOSPEL	Luke 15-1-10	

May the words that are spoken, and the reflections of our hearts, be worthy of Your Grace, O God, to whom all honor and glory is given now and forever more. Amen

MESSAGE                      Where were you? Pastor Beth Hood

November 22, 1963, was my 11th birthday. I had just returned from Music class and was sitting in my 6th grade classroom waiting to go to Gym class when our teacher told us about the assassination of John F. Kennedy. In 1968 I was watching TV the night they broke in with the news of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination and I awoke the morning of end of the year tests to the news of Bobby Kennedy's death. In 1981, I was sitting at my desk in the Marketing Department of San Diego Trust and Savings when I heard news of the attempted assassinations of Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul and the assassination of Anwar Sadat. And 15 years ago today I was at my desk in the Admissions Office of Hyde School when a colleague called to tell me to turn the TV set on. Hyde's student population included children from all over the country, a lot from New York, CT and Virginia. Many of them knew me as the mother of one of their friends and spent a great deal of the day in my office. My brother in law who was here last Sunday ready to catch me when my shoe caught in my robe, was in the Pentagon that day.

Most of us remember where we were in those moments of tragedy. And many of us remember that perhaps on those days, certainly on the days following, we were in church. Coming together into community with others as devastated, as frightened, as questioning as we were. To find community, solace and reassurance.

My sisters and I walked to Ground Zero three months later. And the words of Jeremiah could easily come to mind: "I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins..."

Perhaps the reasoning of the perpetrators was similar to that ascribed to God by Jeremiah: "For my people are foolish, they do not know me; they are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but do not know how to do good." Perhaps.

If Jeremiah's passage of creation undone is full of despair, hopelessness, and nothingness, the New Testament passages are more hopeful. A merciful God actively seeks those who have made the commitment to follow God, but who have lost their way.

Paired with the reading from Jeremiah this morning, the Gospel of Luke gives us some hope, grace. If I am asked to

describe grace, I think of a small church in Manhattan, St. Paul's Chapel dwarfed by surrounding skyscrapers, eclipsed by the gloom of destruction surrounding it. Yet magnificent in its simplicity, dominant in its survival.

I walked the length of the memorial wall with my sisters and countless silent strangers united by the impact of tragedy and hope side by side.

That wall began as a place to post pictures and phone numbers. Have you seen this man, please call....I'm looking for my mother, please call....All of them seeking those who were lost.

The church became a beacon in the darkness. I watched as firefighters entered that house of respite, passing the departing police officers and all greeted and cared for and comforted by men and women grateful not only for the heroism, but also for the chance to be a part of the healing and the survival.

The impact of being there was not for long the view of the devastation, but being a part even as a witness, of the triumph, the healing, the hope, the grace.

Most of the loved ones sought on that wall were never found. Some not even a trace. I suspect that most of the loved ones left behind who have survived the best are those who believe that someone found them. That they were, like the lost lamb on the shoulders of the gentle Good Shepherd, carried home

In Luke's Gospel, we can sense the love God has for creation by the determination to keep looking for those who are lost. And we are reminded that we are all precious to God.

Barbara Brown Taylor calls this fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel "the gospel within the gospel." These parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin followed by the Prodigal Son story are 'all good news, all of the time.' And weren't we hungry for 'good news' in the days following 9/11?

Chapter 14 of Luke ends with the words, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" Chapter 15 begins with a description of who it was that apparently had ears to hear. In those towers were investment bankers and janitors, CEO's and secretaries, Christians and Muslims and Hindus and Buddhists and probably more than a few atheists.

Our hearts were broken not only for the people in the Towers, those who were lost and sought. Our hearts were touched and inspired by the seekers, the people like the man in the red bandana who saved 18 people and was returning with firefighters to help more before losing his own life; the police and fire fighters who ran against the tide into the buildings.

Where did you see yourselves that morning? Were you among the lost? Or do we find ourselves among the seekers? Do we imagine ourselves tagging along with Jesus as he heads out to look for the lost? Did we rejoice when they were found?

One of the most poignant memories I have of that painful time was that even after all of the survivors had been found, the seekers kept looking. Digging through the rubble. And when once in awhile, a body was found, all work stopped as that soul was carried with reverence and love out of the devastation. Everyone put down their shovels and picks and flashlights and stood with bowed heads as one more was carried out. That body as precious and as welcomed as the first survivor.

And when that stretcher had been delivered to those who would take gentle care of it, the work began again with renewed vigor, with renewed hope.

Grace is the promise that hope is not lost, that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. And we need that promise as much today as we did 15 years ago and we will need it 15 years from now.

When I got here this morning, the first person I saw was Barbara Hughes. We were both already emotional. I know I have preached since 9/11 and couldn't remember being as affected as I am this morning. Then it occurred to me I have never led worship on 'the day.' As I was getting ready this morning with the news in the background, and running the sermon over in my mind, I was stopped short by the thought that while we all remember where we were when the towers were hit, the Pentagon was hit, the plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania and the towers came down. Perhaps the emphasis would be better placed on where we were, how we were feeling September 12. On September 11, we were shocked, frightened, amazed. But on September 12 we were one. And we were one with most of the world.

In this time of such dissension and division, I think perhaps the memories of September 12 stand us in better stead. We were united, we were reaching out, we wanted to help and be helped. Streets were lined with American flags, in that time a rallying point. There was community, there was love, there was compassion, there was resolve. We will never forget September 11, but we must live as if it were September 12-seeking the lost, binding up the wounds, coming together.