

**First and Center  
Pastor's Blog  
September 11, 2019**



I heard a radio commentator say that college freshmen this year were almost all born after 9/11. Whoa. For them, the world of fear in which we live is all they know. Taking off shoes at airports. Watching ICE agents round up almost anyone they want. Doing lockdown drills at school because mass shootings are a regular part of our national culture. Some of them remember Sandy Hook. Almost all remember Parkland.

This week, we recognize the 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. Survivors, relatives of those who died, and first responders will gather in New York, D.C. and Pennsylvania, among other places, and read names, place flowers, remember. "Remembering" is a crucial part of Christian faith. We are called to "remember" Jesus every time we eat and drink at Holy Communion. The ancient theology behind that is that in remembering, we find Jesus alive anew, the past coming into the present. Love, challenge, hope.

There is a difference between the phrase I hear people often use about 9/11, "Never forget!" and the word "Remember." "Never forget" often intends to provoke anger and a will to revenge. "Remember" certainly brings pain, but also comfort and hope. We remember not only fire and smoke and death, but also the faces and touches of those loved who did not come home from work that day, the devotion of those who rushed in when others rushed out. "Never forget" has been used in reference to the Holocaust, where the call was that this kind of hate should never happen again. It has a different feel in reference to 9/11.

Many years ago, I traveled with a church group to the Vietnam Memorial in D.C. A child was with us, and as he saw us, and others present, openly weeping, he looked at me and said, "What was this all about?" How to begin to answer that?

I think today about how we answer GenZ children who will hear about 9/11 this week and ask the same question. Will we tell them not to forget, and so to hate those who did this, including all Muslims or Middle Easterners or foreigners in general? Will we tell them this is why we need walls to protect our country, why we keep refugees and immigrants out? Will we tell them this is why we need our guns?

Or, will we remember them into understanding the pain, confusion, fear and loss of that day? Will we remember them into stories of those who gave their lives to help

others live? Will we remember them into a renewed and urgent need to turn away from that kind of hate and into transformational love? They will know the history we teach them, and that will shape them, and our country, for another four generations.

Stephen Sondheim wrote a remarkable \*song for his musical "Into the Woods" about how we teach our children. Remember, and remember that in your remembering, children will listen.

*How do you say to your child in the night  
Nothing is all black but then nothing is all white?  
How do you say it will all be alright  
When you know that it mightn't be true?  
What do you do?  
Careful the things you say  
Children will listen  
Careful the things you do  
Children will see  
And learn  
Children may not obey  
But children will listen  
Children will look to you  
For which way to turn  
To learn what to be  
Careful before you say  
"Listen to me"  
Children will listen  
Careful the wish you make  
Wishes are children  
Careful the path they take  
Wishes come true  
Not free  
Careful the spell you cast  
Not just on children  
Sometimes the spell may last  
Past what you can see  
And turn against you  
Careful the tale you tell  
That is the spell  
Children will listen  
How can you say to a child who's in flight  
Don't slip away and I won't hold so tight?  
What can you say that no matter how slight won't be misunderstood?*

*What do you leave to your child when you're dead  
Only whatever you put in its head  
Things that your mother and father had said  
Which were left to them too  
Careful what you say, children will listen  
Careful you do it too, children will see and learn, oh  
Guide them but step away  
Children will glisten  
Temper with what is true  
And children will turn  
If just to be free  
Careful before you say  
"Listen to me"  
Children will listen  
Children will listen  
Children, children will listen*

~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,  
Transitional Minister

\*Source: [LyricFind](#)  
Songwriters: Stephen Sondheim  
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