

**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 18th 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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