

**Sunday, September 11, 2011**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

### **Sermon – "Let There Be Peace On Earth"**

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Welcome Home! Today is officially the start of a new church year – not a liturgical year, but a program year.

Sunday school begins, the choir is back, coffee hour picks up a bit and folks who were away for the summer rejoin us.

It is great to see all of you.

Today is also the tenth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on our country.

It is a day that we reflect on innocent lives lost, the courage of rescue workers and the random mayhem that is part of the human story.

Anniversaries are important.

It is important that we stop and take stock of how things are going, how we are doing.

Today, we ask ourselves, how have we changed in the last ten years?

A few weeks ago when we had the earthquake, my son Joey was describing his experience.

He lives in Washington, DC.

He was at the Baltimore-Washington International Airport picking up a friend when the earthquake struck.

He immediately assumed that there was a terrorist attack and sought exit from the airport.

He was only eleven years old when the Twin Towers fell, so he has grown up with a fear of terrorists.

He is familiar with airport security procedures: He routinely takes his shoes off, limits his carry on possessions, waits patiently when one of his traveling companions is subject to a search.

His world view includes living in fear of attack – almost expecting one at some point.

Much has changed since that blue sky day ten years ago.

We have all had to acknowledge that our nation's security is fallible, that there are people in the world who hate us enough to kill themselves in an attack, and that leaders are willing to sacrifice innocent lives to make a point.

We also learned that we knew little about our Muslim neighbors and their beliefs.

I chose our first reading today, from the Book of Joshua, because I think it makes an important point about putting a face on an enemy.

The story could have been very different if the men had listened to Rahab's report.

She said that the people of Jericho had heard about their powerful God and would "melt in fear before" them.

She said once the people had heard about the parting of the Red Sea, “our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us.”

I can't help but think that the Israelites might not have had to kill every single person in Jericho to take over the land.

There might have been an alternative to taking possession of this promised territory.

What happened is described several chapters later as the walls of Jericho come tumbling down.

“As soon as the people heard the sound of trumpets, they raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat; so the people charged straight ahead into the city and captured it.

Then they devoted to destruction by the edge of the sword all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys.

Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into the prostitute's house, and bring the woman out of it and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.

So the young men went in and brought Rahab and all of her family out and set them outside the camp of Israel.

They burned down the city and everything in it;

But Rahab the prostitute with her family and all who belonged to her Joshua spared.

Her family has lived in Israel ever since.”

When we look at Rahab's deal with the spies, we see what happens when a human face is put on the enemy.

She helped the spies, and dealt fairly with them, so they agreed to spare her and her family.

I can't help but wonder why only one family would be spared. Why can't we see the value of each human life?

What human gene propels us to annihilate an entire class of people because they are different than we are, or because they have something we want.

On September 11, 2001-- 2,973 people were killed. I honor and mourn each one of those people.

Since that day, 2,659, 514 people have been killed or seriously injured in Afghanistan and Iraq – wars started in response to the attacks of 9/11.

That figure translates to over 800 times as many people as were killed in the attack ten years ago.

These are military personnel, innocent civilians, children, sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, families...all killed,

all gone-communities lost, lives shattered.

God said, “Thou shalt not kill.”

Jesus said, “you must forgive seventy-seven times.”

What do we do with this?

How do we reconcile being people of faith in a culture of war?

I have spent much time pondering this question.  
I have been overwhelmed with the unrest in the world.  
I have been asking God what we might do in our community to foster peace.  
I believe that we can make a commitment to build a peaceful world, one relationship at a time.  
I believe that we can let go of resentments and anger and forgive those who trespass against us.  
Forgiveness is not acceptance or condoning behavior.  
Forgiveness is laying down the burden of hate and hurt and allowing yourself the freedom to love.  
Forgiveness is deciding that you will not live in the past but will embrace all the possibilities of the future.  
We come to church to learn how to do this.  
We gather as a community to practice forgiveness and compassion.  
Then, we take it out into the world.  
This is how we will transform the world.  
One relationship at a time.  
One outreach to someone who is different.  
One conversation with a person we do not know.  
In the year ahead, I would like our congregation to be committed to building peace.  
I am going to use Karen Armstrong's book, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* to develop a sermon series on building a compassionate community.  
I invite you to read this book along with me as we work to strengthen our resolve to live as Christians.  
The book is structured in steps:  
The first step is to learn about *compassion*;  
The second step is to *Look at your own world*;  
The third is *Compassion for yourself*;  
Fourth is learning about *Empathy*;  
Fifth is *Mindfulness*;  
Sixth is *action*;  
The seventh step is *Understanding How Little We Know*;  
The eighth step explores *How we should speak to one another*;  
Step Nine is *Concern for Everybody*;  
Ten is *Knowledge*;  
Eleven is *Recognition*;

And Twelve is *Love your Enemies*.

Each week we will explore the biblical implications for a step.

My goal, my dream, is that we will start here in our own congregation, move out into the community, through work with the other churches and eventually bring the charter for compassion to the community as a whole.

I want us to set the standard for civil behavior, for compassionate action, for humility, for love.

I want us to be the ones known for seeing each person as a brother or sister, for reaching out a hand of love and extending an extravagant welcome to all.

We are Christians.

We are created to build God's kingdom on earth.

We are peacemakers.

O God, let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.