

DR. MICHAEL B. BROWN

9-11:
Looking Back,
Moving Forward

SERMON VOL. 10/11

MARBLE VISION

Media Ministries of
Marble Collegiate Church



Dear Friend,

All of us were touched in deep and lasting ways by the events of September 11, 2001. The tenth anniversary of that day brought back to the surface feelings and emotions that had perhaps been reduced but never resolved. At the WeWo (Wednesday Worship) Service prior to 9-11 this year, I preached this sermon about looking back and moving forward. I hope you find it helpful.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael B. Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

DR. MICHAEL B. BROWN, MINISTER

Dr. Brown's sermon is published monthly by MarbleVision,
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3 West 29th Street New York, NY 10001.

9-11: Looking Back, Moving Forward

Tonight's sermon originally appeared in a much abbreviated form in a recent e-blast. Also, this coming Friday night you can watch me deliver it in about two minutes on Non-Stop New York (Channel 161). Both those formats are incredibly brief. But, for better or worse, you folks gathered here tonight get the full load.

You remember the story of a young minister fresh out of seminary who arrived at his first church on his first Sunday morning. He had designed a worship service and prepared a full length sermon. To his disappointment, only one person attended. So, he went to the man and asked, "What would you like me to do?" The man replied, "I'm not a minister. I'm just a cattle farmer. But, if I took a load of hay out to feed the cows and only one showed up, I would still feed it!" The young man, bolstered by that response, went to the pulpit. He energetically led the hymns, prayed the prayers, received the offering, made the announcements, and preached his whole sermon. Following the Benediction, he walked to the rear door where he shook hands with his one worshiper. "Well," he said to the gentleman, "what did you

think?” The man answered, “I’m not a minister. I’m just a cattle farmer. But, if I took a load of hay out to feed the cows and only one showed up, I wouldn’t give it the whole load!”

As I said, for better or worse, tonight you get the whole load.

But that is all right and appropriate for tonight. For this is a special night in a special time. And as such, it is not the time to abbreviate statements or sentiments about something as critical as the tenth anniversary of 9-11. This date, more so, I think, than the 7th, 8th, or 9th anniversaries, is a bit more poignant, and the feelings that have welled up are a bit more pronounced. So, let me offer to you five pieces of advice for *Looking Back and Moving Forward*.

(1) EMBRACE YOUR MEMORIES.

However painful they may be, do not resist the old wounds that may temporarily re-open. Remember the adage: “Bad things buried grow bigger.” Whatever the tenth anniversary evokes from you or in you emotionally, listen to it, linger with it, learn the lessons your memories have to teach. There is nothing good to be said for denial or repression. “Bad things buried grow bigger.”

(2) EMBRACE YOUR GOOD MEMORIES.

Initially, none of us could see anything good amid the smoke and ash. But, with time comes perspective. And now so many people are talking about acts of kindness and charity that they experienced in the midst of their suffering.

In a recent interview, a woman told of waiting for husband to be found in rubble. As day followed day, she no longer waited for him to be rescued, but merely for his body to be located (which it was after two weeks). She spoke of the volunteers who were there each day during those two weeks, and especially of one specific woman. Each day that volunteer would find the frightened, grieving widow. She would bring blankets, sandwiches, soup. Sometimes she would sit with her and talk, or listen, or hold her hand in silence. Sometimes they would cry together. Sometimes they would pray together. After her husband's body was found, the woman no longer went to Ground Zero. In the interview she said: "I think of that kind woman sometimes. I never knew her name, but she was an angel to me."

You remember the Old Testament character Jacob. His was not an easy life. He was at odds with his brother, whom he had deceived. He fled with

his family under the cover of darkness from a community where their lives were threatened. From time to time, no matter which way he turned, he saw intimidation and fears. In one of those moments, recorded in Genesis 28, he slept in the wilderness and had a powerful dream reminding him that in all his struggles and suffering, he was not alone. Upon awaking, Jacob said: "Surely the Lord was in this place, and I did not know it."

As you look back on your own experience of 9-11 ten years ago, and as you examine your entire cache of memories, remember the good memories – the angels unaware who were there for you with kindness and comfort – the police and fire personnel, the chaplains, the volunteers – the countless acts of mercy by which our city survived. "Surely the Lord was in this place, and I did not know it."

**(3) DO NOT LET THE
MANNER OF A PERSON'S
DEATH OBSCURE THE MEANING
OF A PERSON'S LIFE.**

A young man appeared on TV recently. His father was killed in one of the twin towers. He said: "At first, every time I closed my eyes, all I could see were the buildings coming down. And, all I could



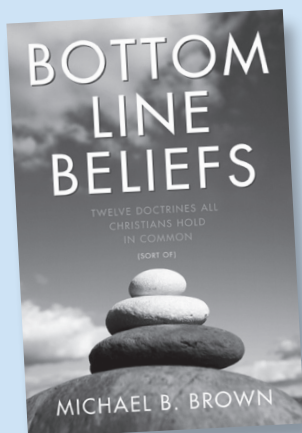
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think was, ‘That’s how my father died.’ Now, though, all I see when I think about my dad are the good times – especially Saturdays on the boat off Long Island. In nice weather, Dad, Mom, my Sister, and I would spend Saturdays on the water, laughing, singing, lost in nature and in one another. So now, all I think is, ‘That’s how my father lived!’”

However tragic the nature of a person’s death may be, their legacy is not how they died but how they lived – what they stood for, how they loved, how they made life better for others. Do not let the manner of a person’s death obscure the meaning of a person’s life.

(4) DEVELOP A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

Tyrants “come and go,” but the dignity of the human spirit and the irrepressible longing for freedom “come and stay.”

From Nero to Hitler (with lots between, before, and since), there have always been forces that threaten the security of the world; but, in time, those forces are defeated, and the world moves forward.

Just think of the people who planned the 9/11 attack. Many are now dead; others are incarcerated; others have disappeared into obscurity. And, in some

of the very countries where ten years ago militants gathered and planned the attacks, we this year have witnessed people demonstrating in the streets (and overthrowing dictatorships) in the effort to find the very kind of freedom and democracy that their predecessors sought to destroy. Tyrants “come and go,” but the dignity of the human spirit and the irrepressible longing for freedom “come and stay.”

(5) HANG ONTO HOPE.

Paul wrote: “We are saved by hope!” Sometimes the world is frightening, overwhelming, bigger than we are. But, in those moments, we serve a Messiah Who said: “In the world you will have trouble, but fear not! For I have overcome the world!” “I’m bigger than it is. You may not be, but I am, and whatever it throws your way, I can handle!”

The twin towers came down. We’re seeing a lot of film footage of that this week. But, recently my younger son, Zachary, and I were sailing around the end of the island with several good friends. We looked at the new structure going up where the old ones came down. It’s like a Phoenix rising victoriously from the ashes. Zachary and I sat there and talked about how that new building is a symbol of resiliency, of the power of

the human spirit. We get knocked down, but we don't stay down. Thus, he and I agreed, more than anything else that new building is truly a "tower of hope."

In our own lives, sometimes we get knocked down:

- Illness
- Financial struggles
- Divorce
- Grief
- Bullying
- Prejudice
- The loss of a job
- The loss of friends
- Or a hundred other ways in which our own inner towers crumble and crash....

But each time, we have a Friend who stands with us in rubble – and takes our hand – and lifts us up so that though we may be knocked down, we don't stay down. In the midst of momentary fear, he says: "Fear not! For I have overcome the world!" "I'm bigger than it is. You may not be, but I am, and whatever it throws your way, I can handle!"

1. Embrace The Memories...
2. Embrace The Good Memories...
3. Don't Let The Manner Of A Person's Death Obscure The Meaning Of A Person's Life...
4. Develop A Historical Perspective... and,
5. Hang Onto Hope.

Do those things, and no matter how difficult it is to look back, we will be given the power to move forward.

Marble Collegiate, 9/7/2011 (WeWo)

CLOSING PRAYER

Caring God, be present with us in this moment as You have been in all moments. As You were there with Jacob in the wilderness, with the disciples who trembled before the immensity of the world, and with all who have struggled or suffered throughout the ages, be here with us. As You were at Ground Zero ten years ago, be present now, we ask. As we remember what took place and try to re-order life in its wake, heal our hurts and calm our fears. And help this anniversary for us to be not only a time of remembrance, but also a time of moving forward and reclaiming hope that however immense the world may seem, You are larger still. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

MARBLE VISION

MEDIA MINISTRIES OF MARBLE COLLEGIATE CHURCH

Dr. Michael B. Brown is the minister of New York City's historic Marble Collegiate Church. This publication is an edited sermon, originally delivered by Dr. Brown from the pulpit. We believe you will find his message one of encouragement and challenge for growth in your daily life.

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"9-11: Looking Back, Moving Forward" in its original form, is available on CD for \$10 (includes shipping and handling). Please make your check payable, and mail, to: MarbleVision, 3 W. 29th Street, New York, NY 10001.

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