

## **WALKIN' THE ROAD**

by Bert Fisher

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Who would have thought three years ago I would be at this pulpit giving a sermon! Mmmmm so David does perform some miracles. I first looked over today's reading and was a little lost. So like I normally do, I read the passages several times and I also usually read verses before and after. And then the flood gates of thoughts and memories kicked in. You all know I was a Lynchburg firefighter and medic for thirty years. On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was working at the fire department as a medic, dropping off a patient at the emergency room. A security guard I know there came up to me and told me a plane had crashed into the world trade center. My first thought was that the New York Fire Department has one catastrophic mess on its hands. Then I thought of my nephew who worked in the building next to the trade center. I thought of a boyhood friend, Orio Palmer, who, like me, chose to be a firefighter, and who was also on duty in New York that day. We were lucky with my nephew. He didn't go to work that day. We weren't so lucky with my friend, Orio.

Battalion Chief Orio Palmer's last words in his radio transmission that morning were: "I'm moving people down from floor 72".

I wonder if Osama Binladen had been shown unconditional love as a child, would I be telling this story?

The first section in Matthew deals with how we should handle a wrong done against us. The second part focuses on the power of prayer in Unity, and in Paul's letter to the Romans, he speaks of Love and its power. Let's take a look at what Matthew writes. I'll paraphrase. A brother commits a wrong, so point out the fault, and talk it over. If he listens, great, you're brothers again. If not, bring in some neutral parties. Witnesses always help keep everyone honest. Now if this

does not help, bring in the Church. As a latter day Catholic that could be scary, The Inquisition and all. Let me explain, as a Catholic when someone says “The Church”, I see the Pope, the College of Cardinals, and the bishops sitting around passing judgments and making laws. Now if the brother does not listen to the Church, then treat him like he’s a tax collector, or like a gentile. In other words, a low-life or wrongdoer.

This made me think of Robert Fulgums’ book “All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten”. In his book Pastor Fulgum compiles essays written over the years. These remind us of the basic rules of living: Always tell the truth, Share with others, use the magic words Please and Thank you, Hold Hands, Flush, and always be nice to others. The world would be a much nicer place if we all just followed these simple rules.

The message that Christ is sending us, through Matthew, is be nice to others, take time with the one that has wronged you, pursue all that is necessary to make peace. If we read further in Matthew, we will see that Peter comes up to Jesus and asks Lord, when my brother wrongs me, how often must I forgive him. Seven times? No, Jesus replies. “Not seven times; I say seventy times seven”. In chapter 6 Matthew gives us the Lords’ Prayer, “Forgive us the wrong we have done as we forgive those who wrong us .” We have all found ourselves really upset with someone at times. We’re ready to “break western” ...I’ll settle this one right now. The point is we must push ourselves to be more forgiving and more understanding. That’s when we must remember, just like we learned in kindergarten to “always be nice to others”.

Moving on in Matthew, he talks about the power of united prayer. In our community we have the inward and outward journeys. Both involve deep and mindful prayer. In our weekly service we have the Lords’ prayer and the community prayer. We all know the power of prayer and have witnessed it in our lives. My family experienced that power just this week. Each day we take time to

light a candle, take a few deep breaths and slow down. Well, were supposed to. We take the lectionary reading, or some spiritual writing, meditate on it, and pray, mindfully and deeply in the moment. This act or ritual every day brings us a spiritual energy, strengthening us so we can take on our world and do it in a God like fashion. This energy empowers us to be more forgiving and understanding when we are wronged.

In Paul's letter to the Romans he reminds them of the Commandments, do not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet. All the commandments are summed up in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love never wrongs the neighbor; hence love is the fulfillment of the Law.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that today is the anniversary of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington D.C. on August 28, 1963. In his speech culminating the march to Washington, he speaks of a day in the future and a loving brotherhood. "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood." In two more quotes, Dr. King says "Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it". And "Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend."

Paul tells the Romans to put aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. The prayer of St. Francis, " Lord make me an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me show love". What we are hearing is the same message. So if we are wronged by our brother, show him love. Absolutely, completely.

I have a deep love in Christ. I know Matthew and Paul are right. Love is the fulfillment of the Law. Christ showed the power of love, over and over. Dr. King was right "Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend."

As a son and brother I was always shown unconditional love by my family. I will be sure to show my granddaughter Lexi this love. I have come a long way since September 1, 2001, and have prayed deeply, and as Tom Fields wrote in his song:

“I don’t know how far I’ve travelled, the most important thing’s I’m walking the road”

AMEN.