

J.D. Ousley
Sermon—11Sept16
Jer.4/Lk.15
“Carrying On”

In the Name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.

As you are no doubt well-aware, today is the 15th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. New York City was the place of the worst incidents; in this church, which is located a couple of miles from the World Trade Center, it would be impossible to preach a sermon today which ignored the attacks.

9/11 is the rare day of the year known by its numerical abbreviation. (By contrast, we don't think of Pearl Harbor Day as “12/7”.) Of all the memorial statues and shrines scattered around this city that commemorate famous wars of the past, the 9/11 Memorial downtown is by far the largest and the most elaborate.

The First Lesson assigned to this morning's worship is strangely appropriate for today. In the text, Jeremiah is speaking of God's coming judgment on sinful humanity.

Jeremiah says, “I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro.”

Indeed, the attacks of 9/11 hit our nation like an earthquake.

One of the consequences of these attacks was that Americans turned to religion for solace. Shell-shocked men and women found themselves wandering into churches, as they tried to find some belief and maybe make sense of the violence. Some of these people were entering churches for the first time in their lives.

One of my most painful memories of September 11, 2001 is seeing the crowds of people that day who were walking up Madison Avenue from downtown. Offices had closed early, and since the subways and buses weren't running, people who lived uptown and worked downtown were forced to walk miles to get home to their apartments. Our church stayed open extra hours to provide a place for the walkers to rest.

For Americans, life changed on that day. Airport security soon became much more complicated. We found ourselves being searched on our way into the opera or at the entrance to a museum.

But the Scripture lesson from the Prophet Jeremiah reminds us that human beings have *always* perceived the world as unstable. For that matter, the world has always *been* unstable; we never know when the next earthquake—the next shaking of foundations--will occur.

And human beings have always suffered from these cataclysmic events. A few weeks after 9/11, a letter of mine was published in the *Church Times* of London. I had read what I felt was an insensitive article about the political situation in the United States that had appeared in the paper.

In my letter, I told how, for days following the attacks, I could hardly enter the church without seeing someone sitting in here, *crying*.

People who didn't live in New York then may not appreciate how many of us who were here still haven't gotten the dreadful day out of our minds. Fifteen years later, we hear a loud noise of someone unloading a truck, and we wonder if terrorists have struck again!

It is still relevant to ask, then: how should we deal with our fears? Even if we can't put these events out of our minds, what should we do to move forward into the future?

After 9/11, many religious people—and even the not so religious—called on God to give them comfort, so they could bear the tragedy. Hymns such as “O God Our Help in Ages Past” and “America the Beautiful” were sung at public events like baseball games.

Today we again turn to God—when thoughts of the terror attacks are still present, and when we often find ourselves on what the government calls, a “heightened alert.”

First, we can give God thanks for the amazing sacrifices of the police, and firefighters, and ambulance drivers who rushed to the Twin Towers on 9/11. Since the attacks everyone knows the phrase, “*first responders*.”

Thinking of them, we remember that we too, have to *respond* to the threats of our own times. We need to look for God to lead us to an inner stability in the face of the world's chaos.

In this respect, we might recall some words of a poster that the British government put up during World War II: The poster read “Keep calm and carry on.” The Bible has its own version of this saying: “Be still and know that I am God.”

As we face continuing threats to our peace today, we can try to keep calm and “carry on” with the work God gives us to do. We can be still and turn to the God who has helped us in ages past.

Carrying on will also include the difficult and dangerous need for *political action* to combat terrorism. And that political response may include—whether we like it or not—*military action*. At the same time, though we must continue to

uphold the ideals of tolerance and justice and peace on which our nation is founded.

“Carrying on” will also include *a spiritual attitude*. We will have to try to live courageously--even optimistically. If we live in terror, the terrorists win.

And carrying on, for Christians, will of course include *prayer*. We will pray, as we did this morning to “God...the author of peace and lover of concord...” We will look for the “peace of God that passes all understanding.” We will pray to the Redeemer who sets us free from sin and death. We will ask our God will “shed his grace” on our beloved country.

Prayer is the one thing we can do, whatever happens. Let’s take that action right now.

Let us pray.

“O God, we ask your blessing upon all of our political leaders at this time. Guide those at every level of government so that may choose the best ways to keep our freedom and maintain stability.

“Heavenly Father, we also pray for all the members of our armed forces. As they respond to acts of terror, as they face conflict and they risk their lives for us, give them courage to carry on the fight for our freedom.

“We pray for our children, who are forced to grow up in a violent and unpredictable world. In the face of an uncertain future, help them to trust in you.

“Finally, O God, we pray for ourselves. Help us to carry on the struggle against terror. Help us to work for peace among all people of faith.

All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen