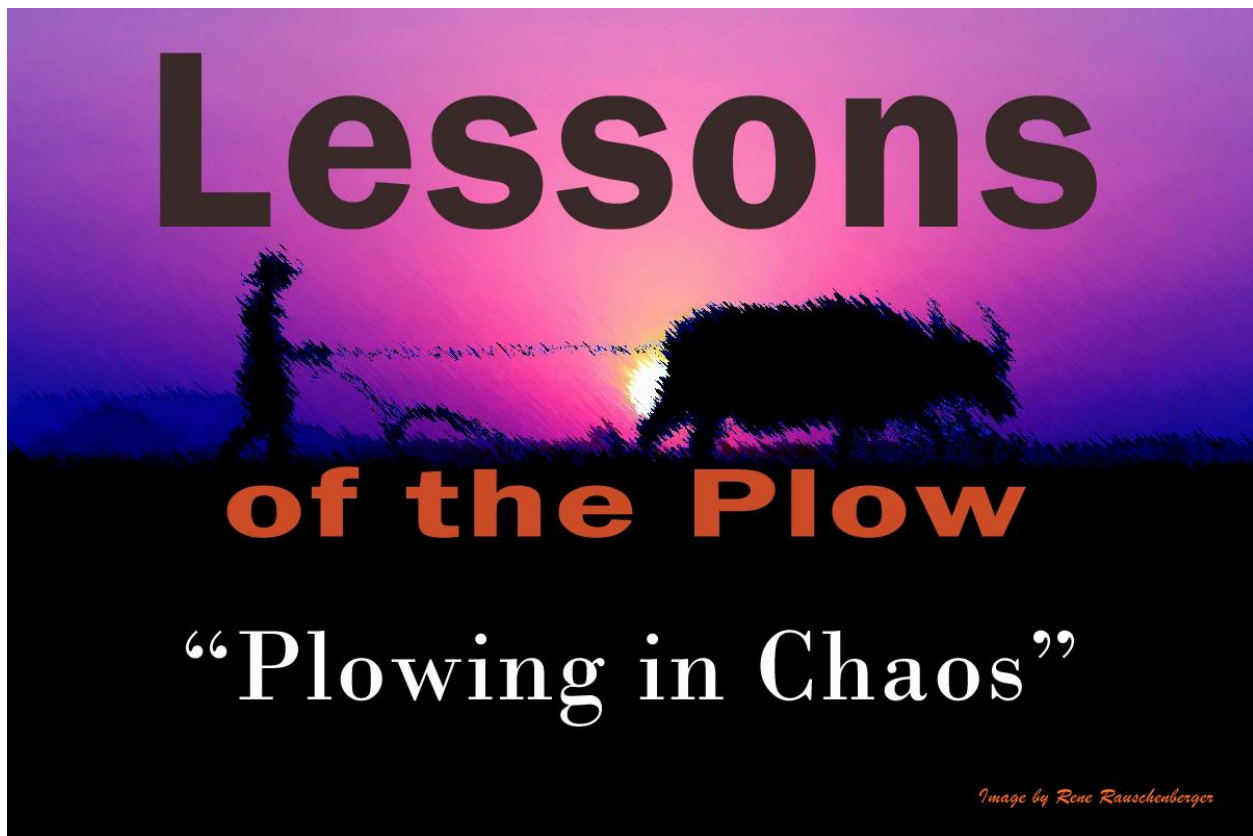


September 11

“Plowing in Chaos”

Psalm 141:7-8

**They will say, “As one plows and breaks up the earth,
so our bones have been scattered at the mouth of the grave.”
But my eyes are fixed on you, Sovereign LORD;
in you I take refuge—do not give me over to death.**



Special Music: Symphony ft. – Dillon Chase

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNhGnUoPZ_0

Press On – Selah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ipUm9LiBW0>

PLOWING IN THE CHAOS

**Chaos has no rhyme or rhythm.
It is a place where we stand
And watch the uncontrolled messiness
Of bedlam
Swirl and whirl around us,
Oblivious to our presence,
And yet,
It drags us along
Into the turmoil of its clutter.
Fire and smoke
Blister our eyes,
Wind tears at our skin
Broken and beaten
Wracked with pain
Our mind screams defeat
As we search for a sign
Of any way out of the
Befuddled muddle.
And God whispers
“You are my hands and my feet.
And will not know defeat.
Be still and know that I am God.”**

**We become quiet
Motionless and hushed,
As the chaos slows**

**And, for the first time
We see others around us
Bound by the mesmerizing horror
That seeks to devour each of us.
And we find purpose
In the needs of others.
We place one hand
Into the hand of our savior
And with the other
We gather sisters and brothers
And let God lead us
Out of the shambles
And into the light,
Finding our purpose
In the ultimate service
Of others.**

Plowing season does not wait around for us. Farmers know that if they don't get those furrows ready before it is time to plant, they are just throwing their money away by buying seed. Sometimes, it just seems like it is impossible to plow, to move ahead, to get it done. Sometimes, it has been raining for weeks and doesn't seem to let up. And a farmer knows that if he plows in those conditions, he will most likely wind up with a stuck tractor or bad furrows. That's a heavy decision for a farmer. It is a damned if I do and damned if I don't scenario. But the farmer doesn't curse God for all the rain. He doesn't curse the heavens. Many a farmer has plowed early because they suspect there might be rain. And sometimes they will start plowing at the beginning of the rain, just praying that they will get finished before the tractor gets stuck in the muck. And yes, I have plowed in the rain, pleading with God that I am able to finish before the tractor bogs down. It is also true that the Ford tractor that I drove did not have a cab or an umbrella, so if it rained, I got drenched. But I didn't quit. To quit was to let chaos win. To quit was to say the tractor going to get bogged down anyway, so why bother. To quit was to say to God, "I'm finished. I'd rather starve that keep doing this." To quit is to allow chaos to win.

On this day in 2001, almost 3000 souls lost their lives to terrorists. While we immediately think of the 2753 lives taken away at the World Trade Center, there were also 184 at the pentagon and 265 on the four planes involved in the attack. In these 21 years since that attack, almost 10,000 First Responders to the various sites have been diagnosed with cancer and over 2000 of those have succumbed to disease brought on by their heroic efforts to rescue as many

people as possible on that day. We may never know the final tally of lives lost to the chaos of 9/11.

Each of us can remember what happened and where we were on that day as the complaisance and false sense of security that we had allowed to distract us, gave way to chaos and terror. As our eyes were glued to our TVs begging for the nightmare to end, travelers found themselves stranded as airports were shut down and travel restrictions came into play. Hate filled the air. Muslims were targeted and harassed. Security tightened everywhere. Paranoia became the watchword for the day. Everything changed in the course of a few hours. Many travelers were stuck for weeks, or even months because flights were cancelled, and alternate forms of transportation became non-existent. The world fell into chaos as markets were disrupted. Gasoline became difficult to find and expensive to purchase when found.

A year later, I was doing a photoshoot in downtown Dallas. That shoot resulted in a couple of award-winning photos as the Texas State Fair. Although the photos were wonderful reflections on several downtown locations, they did not reflect the difficulty I had getting those images. Wandering the streets of downtown Dallas, looking for the perfect perspective, I was often stopped on the sidewalk by security guards and policemen telling me that I could not take photos of buildings in downtown Dallas. Even though I had plenty of identification to prove who I was, including a security clearance that granted me permission to use explosives when working with the secret service, it was assumed that I was scouting for locations for a terrorist attack. I wasn't taking pictures of anything

that wasn't in plain view of everyone in downtown Dallas. It was extremely frustrating, and I was threatened with arrest by several officers. We suddenly found ourselves living in a world where everyone was suspect and every building, bridge, and landmark was a potential target.

Chaos.

Today, there are monuments all over the US built from the mangled wreckage of the twin towers. Several of those monuments are here in Texas. Beautiful, affirming monuments reminding us of a time when in the midst of chaos, we, as a nation, came together to save as many lives as possible and begin healing the rift that had torn us apart and had brought out both the best and the worst in us.

In New York City, even as workers struggled to remove the rubble and locate the remains of the victims, a new kind of chaos occurred. The twin towers had covered twelve city blocks in Manhattan, the most highly prized real estate in the United States. Even with the pain of the huge loss of life, there were many who felt that those prized twelve blocks should be repurposed for other commercial ventures while many others felt that a memorial should be built on the site so that we would always remember the events, courage, fortitude, and pain of that day. I, myself, am extremely glad that the memorial won out. In an area where commercial and financial interests are sovereign, wisdom determined that some things are more important than gold. I haven't yet visited the memorial, but I hope to do so one day.

In the course of writing of this sermon, I also came to a revelation that crushed my heart. We live in a country that is at war with itself to seek to erase our past removing those reminders of both our sins and our tributes in order to appease those who might be offended. We cannot change the past and the monuments we have to places and people before us, expose our imperfections as well as our achievements. They are a reminder that we should not repeat our mistakes. So, I ask you to consider this, what happens in the future when people become offended by the monuments dedicated to both the victims and those who gave their all to save others and suggest, perhaps demand their removal? We tell ourselves that it could never happen. And yet, history has proven otherwise. How can we ensure that our children and our children's children never forget the courage, fortitude, dedication, and sacrifice of this day by so very many?

There were two types of people on that tragic day. Those that were desperately trying to exit the twin towers and those who chose to enter or stay behind in the buildings in an effort to save as many people as possible. Let us imagine ourselves as living in that nightmare, surrounded by fire and smoke, water pouring down from the sprinkler system heads that did nothing to put out the flames from the jet fuel that had been released and ignited by the planes, unable to see the exit signs, people struggling and fighting with each other to enter the stair wells only to be met by a crowd also trying to descend. Screams, panic, explosions, heat, the rocking floor, throats burning from the acrid smoke, people falling past windows outside, other trampled by those seeking to escape. Men, women, children, fire fighters, policemen, all trying to make enough sense

out of the chaos to avoid the inevitable, refusing to accept hopelessness in the messiness of chaos.

If we can see ourselves there, what are we doing? In all the messiness of that moment, are we joining with the chaos? Or are we reaching for the hand of the one who we serve so that we can serve others? Are we able to grab the hand of Jesus, see the chaos through His eyes, and become His hands and feet even knowing that our own lives are in jeopardy? Can we pick up one more precious person? Can we help one more soul escape? Can we plow in the rain?

**They will say, “As one plows and breaks up the earth,
so our bones have been scattered at the mouth of the grave.”
But my eyes are fixed on you, Sovereign LORD;
in you I take refuge—do not give me over to death.**

John 15:12-13 Jesus says this:

**12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.
13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s
friends.**

It is a wonderful thing when we realize that Jesus Christ went to the cross for us. He died for us. No one made Him do it. He chose to do it out of His great love for us. He chose to enter the chaos of our sin and take our hands. Sinful and obstinate creatures that we are, He loves us. Do we love the people around

us with that kind of love, a love that would find us willing to give our lives for people that are not kind to us, that do not love us back?

Luke 6:21-36 says this:

32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.

33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.

34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full.

35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

On that morning of 9/11, in the confusion and chaos, as people became covered with smoke and debris, the prejudices of our hearts melted away. People were no longer black, white, red, yellow, green. They weren't Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, male, female, gay, transgender, or any of the things we normally choose to divide us. They were just souls that needed saving.

What is it that compels a complete stranger to run into a burning building to try and rescue the occupants, even though they are not a first responder? What drives a person to jump into a lake to save someone they don't even know, even if they have no lifeguarding skills? Most of us are unable to do this. That

statement is not a declaration of condemnation, just a statement of fact and echoing how special the people are that can do that. We can feel underqualified and not up for the task. But while we contemplate our options and our belly buttons, we forget that we may be the only option when there isn't a first responder or a lifeguard around.

There were a lot of victims on September 11, 2001. But there were also a great number of heroes, people willing to run into buildings when everyone else was running out. Courage does not mean that we are not afraid. Courage is the ability to look fear in the face and do the right thing anyway. Courage is putting our hand to the plow in a rainstorm, lightning, and thunder all around, because there really is no other choice. Courage is admitting that we are unqualified and allowing God to give us the skills we need to accomplish His purpose. Courage is taking a stand at the gates of Hell knowing that we are no match for Satan, but that our God is bigger than obstacle in our path and that He is standing there with us, to protect and shield us from the onslaught. Courage is saying "yes" to God when our bodies and our minds tell us "no."

Plowing in chaos takes stepping into the fray with courage and having a deep trust in God's plan, not only for our lives, but for all those around us as well. When we see chaos, we are looking at something that has no rhyme or reason for us. We try to shuffle things around to help us sort out the pieces. We want God to tell us "why." And when we still can't make sense of it, we blame God because we believe God should have prevented it. Why did God all allow those terrorists to take so many lives? Why does God allow chaos in the first place? We really

don't appreciate the argument for free will, because human nature says that we should put order in the universe ahead of free will. We want God to interfere with free will even when we don't know that chaos is coming. At the same time, we don't want God to restrict our own free will. If only Adam and Eve had just not eaten the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, we would have to ever face chaos.

Our default as humans is selfishness. If it had not been Adam and Eve, someone would have eaten that fruit. God knew it was going to happen. He prepared for it. The moment that it happened, the sacrifice of His son became inevitable. It could not be avoided. There was no other option. And Jesus Christ, the Son of God, willingly entered the burning building, dove into the lake, chose to face the chaos of our sins head on, and made the sacrifice so that humanity could regain a place at the table of God. And so, through our Creator's great love for us, God's plan unfolded.

The Psalm that is our focus today is a Psalm of David. Verse 7, is a reference to evildoers. We discover that, when we put the verse in the context of verses 5 and 6.

5 Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness;

let him rebuke me—that is oil on my head.

My head will not refuse it,

for my prayer will still be against the deeds of evildoers.

6 Their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs,

and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken.

David is telling us that if a righteous man strikes him, he will welcome it. He will treat it as a lesson from a wise person, a slice of discipline. And he goes on to say that even as he deals with the pain of the blow, he will continue to be in prayer against those who choose evil over good. His reference is telling us that when he is disciplined through righteousness, he considers it a blessing. But the wicked will not receive it the same way. They will be cast down, and as they are cast down, they will remember David's words

**They will say, "As one plows and breaks up the earth,
so our bones have been scattered at the mouth of the grave."**

David is saying that because they cannot see the lessons for what they are, they will fall short. They are more concerned about the fear found in the chaos, than they are the lessons that can be learned from the chaos. Their bones won't even make it into the grave. He is explaining that in order to receive the blessing and the lesson from the chaos, one has to be focused on God. When David looks at the chaos around him, he knows that God is still in control, even if he can't fully appreciate or understand it. In a way, he is asking God to not necessarily give him understanding, but to protect him as he stands in the path of chaos. You can almost hear him thinking out loud, "God, I am plowing in the storm because that is what you told me to do, so please, protect me from the storm while I do your work. And no matter what happens around me, Lord, help me to keep my eyes focused on you and nothing else."

As human beings, we are given to distractions. It can be hard to focus, especially when the world is erupting around us, when it looks to us like there is

no way the puzzle pieces can come together, that everything will remain in chaos. But there will be a time when everything comes together and makes sense. But we don't have to see it come together in order to do what we have been asked to do. Jesus never asks us to make sense out of the chaos. That's His job.

Ballet dancers, figure-skaters, actors, and performers of all types have to master the art of pirouettes. A pirouette is a turn or a spin. The biggest problem with pirouettes is the tendency for a human body to quickly become dizzy. But there is a method that is used to keep this from happening. If you watch a performer doing pirouettes, you will notice that their head stays focused ahead and as their body turns, they will quickly snap their head to maintain their focus on where they are going. By doing so, they do not become dizzy and disoriented. It takes a great deal of practice, precision, coordination, and body control to master this. But it is an absolute necessary skill to master if the performer wants to maintain the integrity of the performance. It is how a ballet dancer can pirouette multiple times across a stage and not stagger.

Christians have to do the very same thing. No matter how great the chaos and distractions are around us, we have to maintain our focus on Jesus in order to keep our balance and plow straight furrows, even as the storm rages around us. If we take our eyes off our Master, there is a good chance we will become a part of the chaos rather than plowing through it.

I want us all to think about that this week. When the storm starts to rage around us, when bad news seems to be the only news, when the world around us panics, do we allow ourselves to become part of that chaos? Or do we work even

harder to push through that chaos by fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer?

Jesus is our rock and our foundation. Nothing can break the chains that bind us to him. Let us not allow our eyes to drift away, trying to find purchase in a world gone mad. Instead, let us keep our gaze on Jesus, letting him guide us as we Plow in the Chaos.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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