Remembering

Unity Church September 14,2025

Psalm 91 John 1:1-5

What a week? A week of tragedy and remembrance of tragedy. The horror of a brilliant young life snuffed out followed by recalling the day thousands of lives were snuffed out. Why is it that the days we remember seem to be more about the tragic ones than the good ones.

I recall the day that JFK was shot like it was yesterday, it was actually 62 years ago this November. The same with Martin Luther King’s assassination, 57 years ago. Some of you recall Pearl Harbor and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Because of the murder that happened this past Wednesday, next year will have two days back to back of recalling tragedy.

Thursday found me in the same place that I was 24 years ago, not bewildered as much as struggling to make sense of it all. The pontificating, yammering press espousing their different theories and platitudes rang hollow and forced. It is too close to the event for any clarity, let alone understanding. Even if the shooter is apprehended, it will be weeks or months before anything comes clear and even then it will only be a partial picture. That partial picture will be exploited by politicians toward whichever ends they are wanting. Please excuse my cynicism.

I’ve come away with two things from this week: first, a reminder of one of Calvin’s basic teachings that each of us are capable of all manner of depravity. Second, something Sherry said on Sunday or Monday evening, “It is becoming clearer and clearer that there is pure evil in the world.”

That last statement may surprise some of you, not because you don’t believe it, but it’s something I don’t spend a lot of time on in my sermons. Yes, I do believe in evil and realize that there is a dark influence in all our lives. But whether naively or intentionally, I’ve spent my life trying to find the good in people. Knowing that all of us are capable of wickedness but by and large are decent people.

I guess what I’m saying is that I’m not surprised by the mean, cruel, stupid things that I and others do, but disappointed. The shooting on Wednesday left me shocked and disgusted.

1

Truth be told, it actually shouldn’t surprise us because anyone who clearly and patiently obliterates the arguments against our way of life and the fact that most of us hold life dear, both in the streets and in the womb, is going to see violent push back. Especially against someone who openly confesses and preaches Jesus Christ. Those who can’t win arguments default to “might makes right.” If I can’t beat you arguing, I can always violently destroy you. (Back to what I said about Calvin and depravity)

Keep in mind, our savior Jesus Christ spent 3 and a half years patiently and clearly debating the scribes and pharisees. When they couldn’t beat him at their own game they did the predictable thing, they killed him. I’m not saying that Charlie Kirk was Jesus Christ, he was simply another redeemed sinner like all of us.

But like Jesus, he forced people to confront the very foundations of their thoughts and actions. Trust me, folks get irate about that, especially when the guy on the other side of the argument makes you look like a monkey. As he became more proficient and successful in his quiet thoughtful confrontation, he became a threat, not only to individuals, but to those with an interest in maintaining the status quo.

I didn’t set out to eulogize Charlie Kirk this morning. I thank God for his life and the influence he has had on so many of our young people. If you ask someone under 40, they have probably heard of him if not watched his podcasts or attended an event at a local college.

This college drop out left an amazing organization in place, the number of his followers on Instagram and Facebook is in the millions. This is mind blowing when one realizes that the majority of his podcasts were about Jesus Christ or capitalism. His appearances on college campuses normally drew crowds in the thousands. Although he didn’t work through the church, he was used to bring a generation back to Jesus Christ. My nephew told me in tears Wednesday evening that Charlie was who got him to reconsider church and to actually think about the future of the country he was inheriting.

By doing this faithfully and successfully, he developed a slew of enemies. We might be shocked at what happened on Wednesday but realistically we shouldn’t have been surprised.

2

Which brings me to the question, what should, or how should we respond to all this? No, I’m not suggesting that we go purchase another gun. Those who live by the sword, die by the sword. (Matthew 26:52) Nor am I suggesting that we hide in the basement. “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” (Romans 8:15)

11 years ago, when I started here at Unity, I found a very small, frightened, group of people. The church had imploded, friends were no longer talking to friends, former members where spreading all manner of insults about the folks who stayed. The congregation was convinced that Presbytery was going to come in, shut the lights off and lock the doors. I commented to a friend that they were like refugees waiting for the next bomb to be dropped.

That first year, I preached a sermon on standing, standing up, standing still. In short, remaining, not being moved, not explaining, simply going about what we were called to be as a church. Doing so in the face of the lies that people were telling their friends about us, smiling at the former members who turned away from us at the grocery store. Being the faithful followers of Jesus Christ, whom we claim as our Lord and Savior.

When I preached that sermon, I had no guarantee that it would work or be successful, but I knew that it was what this little body of believers needed to hear and I believed that God would bless it and in so doing, bless this congregation. At the risk of patting myself on the back, He has blessed it and by his blessing, it continues to work. Praise God.

It worked in 2014 and I see no reason why it won’t work today. Regardless of whether Charlie Kirk is on this side of the river or the other, doesn’t change who our Heavenly Father is, what he has done and is doing for those who have responded to his call.

We are called to love. To love God with all our heart, soul and mind and our neighbor as ourself. Jesus said that those were the two most important commandments. Granted, the events of this week will make some of us want to go buy another gun and possibly more ammo. They will also cause some of us to want to hide in the basement. We are called to neither of these, we are called to love.

3

Yes, Jesus tells us to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves, (Matthew 10:16) but our primary directive is to love. Being as wise as serpents, we recognize that there is evil in the world. Simply look around, it’s quite easy to see, both in the destruction of people’s lives but more so in the decay of our society. And yes, I feel that as members of this democratic republic, we are called to work against it, speak against it, to stand. But there again, we are called to work and act against it through and from love.

The innocence of doves, quite a few of us will have problems with, because like me, it’s been a long time since anyone accused us being innocent. I think that this goes back to the second naiveté that I’ve spoken about in recent sermons. The intentional, almost crazy notion of letting go and letting God because we know from personal experience that He is in control and however he works it out is the way that it should be worked out.

In this reality, in this belief, we are called to stand in our faith, to act in love and not react in the anger and hurt that a lot of us feel.

I need to go back to a point that I made earlier about what Sherry said, “It is becoming clearer and clearer that there is pure evil in the world.” I said that I don’t talk much about evil in my sermons. There’s a reason for that, a couple of reasons.

I believe in gravity, (9.80665 m/s²) I think I learned that in 10th or 11th grade. Although I believe in gravity, I rarely talk about it, because it’s just there. Most people don’t talk about gravity, but they know if they lose their balance they will fall and possibly get hurt. They talk about falling but not the gravity that causes it.

Likewise, I believe in evil. You can start with the fall in Genesis 3, or you can simply look around: addiction, abuse, violence, back biting, criticism, pridefulness, lust, pornography, selfishness, etc, etc. It’s all right there in front of us and sadly, in us. It is not necessarily synonymous with sin, there is evil beyond basic human sinfulness, but most evil comes from us humans and the destructive things we do because of sin to ourselves, our loved ones and the world.

My personal experience is that preaching about evil, sin and wickedness may be an entertaining exercise, but by and large does very little to curb the practice. If it did, there would be very little evil around because preachers have been railing against it for centuries. In reality all of us practice or do it, whether intentionally or not. Which is one of the reasons we have the prayer of confession each week. 4

But my experience is quite a few believers get distracted or obsessed with evil and spend their time focusing or obsessing about it and not focusing on what we’re actually called to do, which is to love our neighbors as ourselves.

In closing I’d like to look at the 2 scriptures we read up front. The one from John should not only tell us why we don’t need to spend our time focusing on evil, but also give us an assurance of who we serve. John 1:1-5, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him ~~was~~ (is) life, and the life ~~was~~ (is) the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

The light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

I will add to this assurance Psalm 91:1-4, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.’ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.”

To this assurance I will add Pauls letter to the Romans 14:7-9:7 “None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.  For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”

We are called to stand, to love. Charlie Kirk gave us a short-lived example of what that looks like. As the scripture says, “Go and do likewise.” Amen

5

Psalm 91

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence;

he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day,

nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you.

You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.

Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways.

On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name.

When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will rescue him and honor him.

With long life I will satisfy him, and show him my salvation.

John 1:1-5,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him ~~was~~ (is) life, and the life ~~was~~ (is) the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Romans 14:7-9 None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.