

Remembering 9/11 From One Chaplain's Eyes at Ground Zero

The world changed for all of us on 9/11. I can remember where I was when everything changed. As a Bible college student on the West Coast, my mom woke me up on that fateful morning to tell me the news as my dad had called her. I went downstairs to turn on the TV and soon I saw, along with millions of viewers worldwide, the second plane hit the World Trade Center. Instantly I knew we were under attack.

Jim Jenkins, ., was a well-loved adjunct professor at our college. But because of the events that took place that day, being a chaplain in the Coast Guard, he was deployed to Ground Zero in New York City. I still remember his stories about it when he returned to us at the college. I was transfixed when he'd shared how he talked to a man who drove boats in New York, and how the man had, "the stare." It's the look people make when they are telling a true story, and their gaze looks like they are staring 1000 yards away but they share their trauma. This man described to Jim how he ferried thousands of people that day away from Ground Zero, but he could see people jumping to their deaths from the World Trade Center.

When Jim shared his stories of serving as a chaplain at Ground Zero, as a sophomore in college I knew one way or another I would be part of what began to transpire. Within a few years, I served in the Marines and was deployed to Iraq (2007-2008) and Afghanistan (2009). And then, later, I was serving overseas in 2020 when Jim contacted me and started sending me chapters for a book he was writing. He said, "I know I have to tell this story everywhere. This story needs to be told because too many people are forgetting."

Eventually I hosted Jim on my podcast, Adventures in the Spirit, having a conversation about his time at Ground Zero and the emotional toll it took. He served thousands of people and shared a story of when he was escorting families to what became known as, "The Pile." A man he took note of was on the verge of an emotional outburst, and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani was present. The man ran toward the mayor shouting, "This is your fault, this is your fault." But Jim and Rudy held the man, comforting him, holding his arms and touching his chest, saying, "We are so sorry for your loss. We are so sorry."

Jim mentions how later Rudy Giuliani came over and held his face, looking into his eyes and saying, "Thank you for serving us."

On my podcast, Jim shares a portion of this story but he recounts many other things about Ground Zero in his book, From Rubble to Redemption.

This month, we remember 9/11 after 20 years. The effects of that day are still felt today, especially as America's time in Afghanistan has been brought to an embarrassing exit by the Biden White House's decision. And I want to do everything I can to help share Jim's stories and many others about 9/11, and the numerous veterans who have served in the global War on Terror that followed.

Listen to my conversation with my friend Jim Jenkins anywhere you listen to podcasts. You can subscribe on Apple, Spotify, Google, Charisma or your preferred podcast platform. {eoa}

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