

16th Sunday of the Year
July 20, 2014

"A sower went out to sow. As he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirty fold."

Matthew 13: 1-23

The hero with the red handkerchief

You descend 70 feet below ground through a corridor of concrete walls - and are confronted with an immense piece of twisted steel. You continue through several galleries that lead to a hall. One side of the hall is a massive sixty-foot-high concrete wall - on the other side is the Hudson River.

This is the National September 11 Memorial Museum, one of the most haunting places on earth, located on the site of where the World Trade Center Towers stood. The 9/11 Museum is a depository of videos, audio recordings, photographs and thousands of objects to document, minute by minute, the events of that horrific Tuesday.

Of the thousands of personal items on display is one that represents the worst and best of 9/11: a red bandana, belonging to 24-year-old Welles Crowther. Welles was an equities trader who worked on the 104th floor of the South Tower. After the planes hit and smoke overwhelmed the building, Welles put his experience as a volunteer firefighter to work. He put his trademark red bandanna over his nose and mouth and found the stairs leading out of the tower, and then began helping hundreds of people make their way out of the doomed building. Welles himself never made it out.

Months later, in news accounts of the final minutes in the tower, survivors recounted the story of the young man with the red bandanna who led them to safety. His mother Alison knew immediately that it was her happy, generous son Welles - who had carried a red handkerchief with him since he was a boy.

The family gave his red handkerchief to the museum. And from this day forward, all who visit the 9/11 Museum will have a chance to know the sacrifice of a young man who - like so many that day - gave his life so others might live.

At the museum's dedication ceremony, Alison took the stage to say that she and her husband "could not be more proud" of their son. "Welles believed that we are all connected as one human family," she said. "This is the true legacy of September 11."

Welles Crowther's red bandana is a fitting image for today's Gospel: the selfless good we do - from the bravery of Welles Crowther and the many of the saints of 9/11 to the smallest, unseen and most ordinary acts of generosity and kindness - are seeds that we plant in this earth we all share that result in a harvest of hope we cannot imagine. Such "sowing" is pure faith: planting small seeds that break open to realize the harvest within it, that struggle to survive the most barren soil to provide hope, justice and mercy for every creature. Jesus challenges us in the parable of the sower to be both sower and seed: to sow seeds of encouragement, joy and reconciliation regardless of the "ground" on which it is scattered, and to imitate the seed's total giving of self that becomes the harvest of Gospel justice and mercy.

Stuff you need to Know" Some thoughts shared by Connections of MediaWorks, and of course some by myself through the power of the Holy Spirit