

Honoring the Lost and Commemorating What Was Found

The Broadway musical “Come From Away” is a fast-moving musical set in the remote town of Gander, Newfoundland. In the early days of transatlantic flight, the Gander airport was a critical refueling point and safety net



for air travel between North America and Europe. It was also a critical Canadian military installation in World War II. Constructed in 1937, Gander once was the largest airport in the world but had been little used for decades. On September 11, 2001, thirty-eight wide-bodied aircraft were diverted to Gander, as all air traffic to the United States was grounded. Suddenly, the tiny village with a population of 9,600 accommodated 6,600 visitors from the grounded aircraft in Gander. Serving their surprise guests was a massive undertaking.

Last year -- the 20th anniversary of 9/11 -- the Broadway show’s website described the people of Gander and their commitment to telling the story: “20 years ago, the world learned a poignant lesson in compassion, generosity, and finding the light in the darkest of places. Inspired by the Newfoundlanders who opened their hearts, arms, and homes without a second thought, we strive to remember and act with the same extraordinary kindness in their honor. This year we will honor what was lost & we will commemorate what we found. We will come together to spread love, appreciation, understanding, and kindness to all who come from away.”

“Honoring what was lost” – the world mourned the unspeakable and senseless loss of life from the 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States. We will all forever remember this fateful day. Some lost loved ones that day, but all Americans felt the pain from this tragedy. The passengers and crew of the 38 airliners diverted to Gander were confused and lost when they learned about the tragedies back home. Housed in temporary emergency shelters and private homes, they could not know when they would reach their destination. The heroic efforts of Gander locals are the focal point of the story of “what we found.” What was found was the goodness of mankind, shining brightly in a dark world. We found kindness in the hearts of Newfoundlanders living near isolation on a rock called Newfoundland. They were willing to share all they had to comfort those whose world was turned upside down. God gives some of His most important tasks to the meek and humble.

Tragic events like 9/11 reveal the dark side of a small number of people. But the kindness and compassion of the Newfoundlanders provided the light that overcame the darkness. Those who were served on that rock will most remember the goodness of mankind – the people who opened their hearts and homes to strangers in need. *Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves (Romans 12:10).* They helped strangers as if they were family. The Bible tells us: *The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 19:34).*

There will be times in our lives when we have the opportunity to help strangers in need. Hopefully, it will not be a result of a massive tragic event such as 9/11. If and when that opportunity comes, let us respond as the Newfoundlanders did: *Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (Colossians 3:12).*

Closing Prayer: Dear Lord. We will never forget the empty feeling in our hearts following the evil attack on our country. Much was lost that day. But, let us rise above the sense of loss to what was found – let us commemorate a small community that rose to the occasion to kindly, compassionately, and unselfishly help strangers in their time of need. Let us be resolved to do the same if we ever have the chance. Amen.