

Deeper faith, stronger community one year after Vegas tragedy

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LAS VEGAS (BP)—When Pastor Brett Capaci spoke to his congregation about a mass shooting that stunned his city one year ago, he likened it to a terroristic “9/11 moment” for Las Vegas—and he even evoked the tears Jesus shed at Lazarus’ grave in Bethany 2,000 years earlier.

“Our city in large measure fell into deep sadness, disappointment, disillusionment. ... It was a 9/11 moment,” Capaci said, recalling the day Stephen Paddock stood in an upper window of the Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino and began firing a gun that could spew hundreds of rounds a minute, killing 58 and injuring about 500 at an outdoor concert.

Instead of questioning Jesus’ presence in his city’s tragedy, as sisters Mary and Martha did in the biblical account of Lazarus’ death, Capaci encouraged Shadow Hills Baptist Church to draw deeper into their faith.

“Disappointments in life can cause us to press deeper into our faith, not to lose faith and not to isolate our disappointments from our faith, but literally to go deeper into who God is,” Capaci said in his Sept. 30 sermon.

‘Jesus is the ultimate answer’



Vance Pitman, founder and senior pastor of Hope Church in Las Vegas. (Photo / Courtesy of Hope Church)

Another Las Vegas pastor, Vance Pitman, said he believes Jesus is the answer to the lingering questions and pain many still feel a year after hundreds of wounded concertgoers were transported to Las Vegas hospitals, and perhaps hundreds of first responders were called into action.

“We want to try and be involved in the community so that we can have conversations with people that would lead them to Jesus, because we think that Jesus is the ultimate answer to all of the questions that they have,” said Pitman, pastor of Hope Church, in an interview on the anniversary of the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history.

“We think it’s important to serve our city and serve our community, and share the love of Jesus with them, especially in times of crisis like this.”

The Sept. 30 worship service at Hope Church included prayers for first responders who shared the platform, along with the presentation of a \$25,000 gift to Sunrise Hospital to remodel a lounge that serves emergency personnel to demonstrate the church’s love and support. The money is what remains of a special fund the church created that has already given \$25,000 to help community members affected by the shooting.

The church's grief counseling has led to professions of faith and salvation among a few medical personnel, Pitman said.

"They've come to know the Lord and gotten baptized in our fellowship," he said in an interview.

The shooting personally affected Hope Church, Pitman said.

"We had some that were shot and wounded. We had some of the police officers that were first on the scene," he said. "One of the officers that interviewed every victim in the hospital was in our church."

Remembrance important part of healing

The worship services at Shadow Hills and Hope Church were two among many across the city that included remembrance of the shooting. A sunrise gathering at the Clark County Government Amphitheater included 58 seconds of silence and the release of 58 doves. A City Hall prayer meeting and an evening service at the downtown Community Healing Garden built after the tragedy were among many community events including a 5K run.

Remembrance is important to healing and looking forward, said Capaci, who addressed the anniversary in all of his four weekend worship services. He asked members to wear black and gold, the colors of the Las Vegas Golden Knights hockey team, in support of the city. Several Shadow Hills members were affected by the tragedy, both physically and emotionally.

"Remembering and memorializing this tragic event was important in order to bless the community by taking an active role in the healing process of all those directly or indirectly affected," Capaci said. "Taking time to remember also provides the church an opportunity to honor and show gratitude toward our city's first responders who constantly serve us on the

front lines.”

Pitman believes the tragedy has strengthened the city and made it a more cohesive community.

“October 1 changed Las Vegas,” Pitman said. “Las Vegas went from being a community of transients to a united city of people that have come together as a real vibrant community. The (Twitter) hashtag originally was Vegas Strong. The one that’s going around today is Vegas Stronger.”

In addition to 58 deaths, the FBI put the official number of individuals wounded by gunshots at 489. Hundreds of others were injured by trampling as crowds fled the scene.

No motive for the shooting ever was uncovered. Paddock shot and killed himself as police approached his hotel room. His estate of nearly \$1.4 million will be given to victims, the Associated Press reported Sept. 29.