

## A Pentecost 13

9-11-11

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“...For All People”

Isaiah 56.1 & 7

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This morning the Prophet Isaiah says to us, “Thus says the LORD: Maintain justice, and do what is right. For soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance will be revealed ... And my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

Today is the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It was a horrific day and persists as a deep wound in the national psyche.

189 people were killed at the Pentagon.

2,753 people were killed at the World Trade Towers.

44 people were killed when Flight 93 crashed into a field in Pennsylvania.

We remember their deaths, we continue to pray for their families whose lives are forever disrupted, and we support those in the government and military who continue to seek to bring all those responsible to justice and who work to defend us from future threats.

It was a horrific day and it is good for us to remember. How could we forget? The media has been flooding us with reminders. Magazines and newspapers have carried 9/11 stories for weeks, months. Countless cable channels are doing 9/11 stories. We have been constantly reminded of this national tragedy in the days leading up to this 9/11 anniversary.

The date – **9/11** – has taken on iconic proportions. It has risen above the other national agonies that we have suffered through.

1,836 people died in Hurricane Katrina, and the City of New Orleans was paralyzed – parts of it forever destroyed. Do you remember the year, Katrina struck the Gulf Coast? The month? The day?

This year a record number of killer storms swept across the South. Tuscaloosa Alabama was all but wiped off the map. Do you remember that date?

Neither of those dates stick in the memory the way **9/11** does.

Why is that?

Why does **9/11** rise in our consciousness above those other dates?

Why does that date sting our national conscience in a way other dates do not?

Is it not because in addition to being a terrible human tragedy, the **9/11** attacks also challenged some of our most cherished assumptions in a way those other disasters did not ... could not?

When we saw on live television flames shooting out of the Pentagon and then saw the Twin Towers come crashing down, there was a collective, national gasp, a communal “Oh my God”, unlike anything we had experienced since perhaps Pearl Harbor.

Since 9/11 there have been events that have been far more destructive. The physical destruction that took place on 9/11 can be measured in city blocks. The effect of April’s tornados have to be

measured in square miles. We have experienced events that were far more destructive, but none have so challenged our most treasured beliefs.

We Americans assumed we were invincible—  
on 9/11 we learned that we were *very* vulnerable.

We Americans assumed that wars would always be fought on foreign soil –  
9/11 showed us that the battle could be brought to our soil.

We Americans assumed that our sky-scrapers were strong and solid and permanent.  
On 9/11 we saw Twin Towers coming down like a house of cards and smoke rising from the bastion of our military power.

We Americans assumed that we could safely go about our business, go to work and be secure, and travel safely from point A to point B.

On 9-11 we experienced terror.

And deep down inside, many Americans believed – *believe* – that God loves American more than any other country. That we are especially favored and that Divine protection rests over us.

We don't say it like that out loud – it drips with arrogance when voiced – but deep down inside it's a conviction many Americans harbor.

The President of our Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, the Rev. Matthew Harrison, published "A Hopeful Lamentation on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 9/11". It expresses the sadness many of us still feel in the wake of this event, and calls on us to pray for those who are still grieving and for those who protect and defend us.

It's a good piece and worth reading.

But it begins with this sentence:

"On Sunday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, the ***world*** will stand still as the first post-9/11 decade comes to a close." Really – the ***world***... ????

1/12: does ***that*** date stand out in your memory? Do you remember what happened on 1/12?

1-12-10: that's the day an earthquake killed **316,000** people in Haiti. 9/11 ***may*** pass unnoticed there.

Yes, for us Americans 9/11 was a terrible, terrible tragedy. It inflicted a deep wound in *our* national psyche. It is good for us to remember those who died, to pray for those who still grieve, and to support those who protect and defend us.

But it is *our* tragedy. And while we wish it never had happened, that it made us examine some of our most cherished beliefs may have been a good thing, for some of those cherished beliefs are mildly idolatrous.

What Jesus said about material wealth is just as true for our towers and fortresses as it is for dollars and cents: every material thing is subject to "moth and rust". Nothing we build in this world is permanent. Everything in this world is subject to decay. We Americans can no more build a Tower of Babel to challenge the heavens than could the ancients. Sooner or later, *time* would have brought down the Twin Towers just as surely as the terrorists did.

We need a strong military, we need secure borders, we must always be vigilant, but our *ultimate* security is not in political or military power. *No* earthly power, *no* kingdom of this world is invincible. God is our refuge and our strength. God is our ultimate defense in the time of terror.

If 9/11 would pull us into a “us verses them” mentality, the lessons assigned for this Sunday remind us that God takes the larger view and that his love, his grace, his salvation rises above nationalism and extends to all people.

In today’s Gospel story (Matthew 15.21-28) the Apostles are put out by this “foreigner”. The woman seeking a mercy for her sick daughter is a Canaanite. As far as the Apostles are concerned, she’s an enemy. *Terrorists* come from Canaan. “Send her back”, they cry. We are “us” and she is one of “them”. One of their most cherished assumptions is that God loves us Israelites more than anyone else in the whole world.

Jesus gives voice to what they are thinking so they can hear what it sounds like: “Yes, I was sent only for the lost sheep of Israel.” Designed to lead them to a self-awareness, I think it only drew a hearty “amen” from the Apostles.

Jesus vocalizes their prejudice a second time: “Woman, it is not right to take food from the Master’s children and give it to dogs.” If that had been aimed at us, you and I would have gone ballistic: Who you callin’ a “dog”.

This woman is not defensive, not distracted, not discouraged. She is persistent: “Even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from the table.” And that is all I need – just a crumb of grace.

***That***, Jesus said, is great faith. Faith that connects her daughter’s need to God grace. Her daughter is healed.

And you would hope that the Apostles’s twin towers of arrogance and self-righteousness would have come crashing down. But we know it took many more lessons.

9/11 was a painfully powerful lesson for us: we are ***not*** invincible, our towers ***not*** impregnable, our land ***not*** unreachable. And, yes, we need to be vigilant, we need to be fortified. But we do not need to be terrorized: God is our refuge and our strength.

Ultimately, the attacks of 9/11 expose the darkness of the human heart. We do not – none of us – love our neighbor as ourselves. We humans will hurt others for political or ideological reasons, or justify and support our leaders when they do. None of that is unique to the 9/11 terrorists. It is the human condition.

It is ***not*** us Americans against those foreigners.

It is ***not*** us Christians against those Muslims.

It is a deeper problem of the human soul. It is light versus darkness.

And this morning the Prophet Isaiah says to us

“Thus says the LORD:

Maintain justice, and do what is right.

For soon ***my*** salvation will come, and ***my*** deliverance will be revealed.

And my house shall be called a house of prayer for ***all*** peoples.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!