

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Various

"911 – Ten Years Later"

A LOOK BACK

Ten years ago was a Tuesday. The skies were blue, the sun was bright, the mood of the nation upbeat. The economy was booming, 401Ks solid, and the Cold War seemed like a distant memory.

And then in a moment that all changed. I am sure we all remember where we were on that fateful day. I was sleeping in, happy that after two years of searching, we finally had a full-time assisting priest. Fr. Hubbard, my first curate, had recently joined our staff that July. I was looking forward to a relaxing day before coming into church to prepare for our first Vestry meeting since June. But then I was awoken by my wife who told me that planes had crashed into the World Trade Center Towers. I was like, "What?" not quite sure what it all meant. So I got out of bed and went downstairs and saw that dreadful sight of thick black smoke billowing out large gashes in both towers. None of the TV commentators really knew what was going on except that it was most likely a terrorist attack.

I called my parents and told them to turn on their TV. And then a few moments later President Bush gave his famous address to the nation from Booker Elementary School in Florida. I then heard about the crash at the Pentagon and watched the Towers collapse. And then got word of the plane crash in Shanksville, PA.

If you were like me, besides the shock and the anger that was ever present, there was also a bitter, sick, nagging feeling in my gut. For the rest of the day nothing seemed good or pleasant anymore. I hate that feeling – it's similar to what happens when you lose a loved one or get very tragic news.

But we all went through it – though from a distance. For those in the direct line of fire – in NY, DC, and PA – they suffered tremendously – 343 firefighters, 50 police officers, children who were on two of the four flights, pedestrians outside the Towers, in total 3000 souls, lost in a couple hours. Gone. In the weeks and months to follow, over 60,000 exposed to the hazardous dust, many now suffering the effects from cancer to lung disease and sinusitis. In the years to follow two wars, 6000 dead, 40,000 wounded servicemen, over 3 trillion spent, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans killed, 4 million displaced, and at least 42 planned terrorist attacks thwarted. And while one can argue of the pros and cons over the wars that ensued, one thing is for certain, life would never be the same in our world.

WHY?

Every generation experiences profound tragedies that change us as a society. Specific days that bind us together because of one event that is so hurtful and evil that it shakes everyone to the core. One can

think of December 7, 1941 – that Day of Infamy when the Japanese bombed our Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor and ushered us into World War 2. Or November 23, 1963, the day President JF Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald – day that shattered a nation’s optimism and ushered in the upheaval of the 1960’s.

And now September 11, 2001. We all knew it was possible. Attacks had already occurred on the World Trade Center some eight years earlier. We knew there were Islamic terrorists who hated us because of our support for Israel, what they perceive as Western decadence, and their own evil ideology of world conquest on behalf of their so-called god, *Allah*. It had been talked about, written about, and even Hollywood got into the action. Church Norris movies *Invasion USA* and *Delta Force* come to mind, as well as Arnold Schwarzenegger’s movie *True Lies*. In fact, right before 911, Chuck Norris had just completed a TV movie about an atomic bomb smuggled into the US by Islamic terrorists in order to free three already convicted of the bombing the World trade center in 1993. Ironically, the movie was to be called “*The President’s Man: Ground Zero.*” When shown on CBS in 2002 the title was changed to “*The President’s Man: A Line in the Sand.*”

While the warning signs were there, it wasn’t until that Tuesday morning ten years ago, that we experienced the true horror of terrorism. And now that we have, the question still remains why? God could have stopped it, but He did not. We will not know the specific answer to the question this side of glory, I believe there is another question to ask, and that is “Why not?”

Should we really be surprised?

ANSWERS FROM THE WORD OF GOD

You know the beauty of God’s Word is that it is true. It speaks life into human existence, it reveals what is really important, it puts things into perspective, it uncovers ultimate reality. The Apostle Paul writes in **Romans 15:4**, “*For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*” To understand 911, one must understand the Word of God.

In the third chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes written almost 3000 years ago King Solomon wrote,

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—

2A time to give birth and a time to die;

A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

3A time to kill and a time to heal;

A time to tear down and a time to build up.

4A time to weep and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn and a time to dance.

5A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;

A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.

6A time to search and a time to give up as lost;

A time to keep and a time to throw away.

7A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;

A time to be silent and a time to speak.

8A time to love and a time to hate;

A time for war and a time for peace.

In other words, life will be full of both good and evil, joy and despair, love and hate. We know that we live in a fallen world. Indeed **Romans 8:18-25** tells us that the entire creation itself groans, longing for the revealing of the sons of God when the curse will be lifted.

But until that time we are in a war. The Apostle Paul wrote in **Eph. 6:10-12**, “*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*”

There is natural evil and there is spiritual evil. And there is a malevolent being, whom the Bible calls Satan and the devil. Jesus said as much. So though I wish it were not the case, it is still the reality.

And we all have a choice – not only how will we live, but how will we respond to the evil in life?

On the night before He died, Jesus said these profound words as recorded in **John 16:33**: “*In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.*”

Notice He didn’t say “you will,” or “you had,” but “you have” tribulation. The word, “tribulation,” means intense suffering.

1 Peter 1:5-7: “*who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.*”

There will also be trials. They are even necessary. They are there to test our faith and to bring glory to Jesus Christ. The truth is Christ suffered all that evil could throw at Him, on our behalf. And the servant is not greater than his Master. We will suffer hardship, too.

Lk. 17:1: *He said to His disciples, “It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come!* If you look at the larger context of this passage you will see that the word translated, “stumbling blocks” literally means, temptations to sin. There will even be temptations.

WE CAN OVERCOME

But the good news is that we can overcome them all because of the one who is the Great Overcomer, Jesus Christ! Look now at **1 John 4:2-4:** *“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”*

Do you believe that? We have the power of Almighty God – the One who made us, the One who loves us, the One who provides for us – living in us; that is the Holy Spirit. Unlike the New Age movement that teaches that we can become our own little gods – the Bible is clear, Jesus is clear – We don’t become gods, we have God living in us through the Holy Spirit who enables us to be like God. But it is always through the great core of what love is all about – looking outward and upward. Loving God and loving our neighbor.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AND WHAT WILL YOU DO?

The perpetrators of the evil on 9/11 – their desire was to sow the seeds of fear, confusion, and division. But instead of fear, there was courage. Who can forget Todd Beamer after saying the Lord’s Prayer with a phone operator, telling his fellow passengers on Flight 93, “Let’s Roll,” and then proceeding to storm the cockpit, preventing the terrorists from crashing the aircraft into the White House or Capital building?. Or the thousands of first responders who rushed into help, even though for some it meant no return?

Instead of confusion, there was clarity. Who can forget a few days after the tragedy, President Bush on his bullhorn telling rescue workers *“...that America today, is on bended knee, in prayer for the people whose lives were lost here, for the workers who work here, for the families who mourn. The nation stands with the good people of New York City and New Jersey and Connecticut as we mourn the loss of thousands of our citizens.”*

One of the rescue workers yelled back, "*I can't hear you!*" To which the president responded, "*I can hear you! I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you! And the people -- and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!*"

His clear leadership helped our nation to rise up out of the ashes and make sure it would not happen again.

Instead of division there was unity. Recall Republican and Democrat lawmakers singing "God Bless America" on the steps of the Capitol building and then proceeding to work together for the next couple years. I remember, as I drove from church following the last service on the first Sunday after 911, seeing two out of every three homes with American flags hanging from their porches and windows. Instead of falling apart our nation banded together. That, my friends, is what I see when I see 911.

And it is the same response that God calls us to. But it goes deeper. St. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 13:12-13** that now we see through a mirror dimly, but one day we will see clearly. And what abides in this life are three things – faith, hope, and love.

Faith to realize that there is more to this life than what meets the eye. God is in control. God let 911 happen for a reason. My faith tells me to keep trusting because it's still part of the plan.

Hope - the blessed hope is Christ's return and the resurrection. You see the goodness of God will always prevail. We are all sinners and yet God forgives and seeks to restore us. Jesus said not only to love your neighbor, He said to love your enemies. And that means to forgive – to let it go and for evil – give good. Allow room for the vengeance of God. He is the final arbitrator of justice.

Two days after 911, in the midst of the wreckage, one of the workers found an intact 20 foot cross beam resemble the shape of a cross. That cross was lifted up and used as source of comfort to many of the recovery workers. Weeks later it was moved away from the debris field and put on a concrete pedestal for several years. Yet, another divine reminder; it is the real reason we have hope.

And we have hope because of the love of God. Love is the only thing that matters. In fact, Paul goes on to say, "***Faith, hope, and love remain, these three, but the greatest of these is love.***"

So my question this day is this are you growing in the love of God? Are you loving your neighbor as yourself? Are you praying for those who are trying to inflict harm on our nation? Are you praying for family members who have rubbed you the wrong way or don't know the love, our coworkers?

How are you responding to what God has allowed to happen to you? That, my friends, is the real question. What do you see? What will you do? In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!