

**Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish**  
**11 September 2016**

A Sermon of Remembrance For All The Victims of September 11, 2001  
At the Towers and Beyond

“I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;  
and to the heavens, and they had no light.  
I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,  
and all the hills moved to and fro.  
I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,  
and all the birds of the air had fled.  
I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,  
and all its cities were laid in ruins  
before the LORD...” (Jeremiah 4)

It has been 15 years since the dark cloud of ashes in the clear sunny sky masked briefly the horror beyond, but just for a few seconds. After that initial cloud we could see and hear the sounds and visions of human despair: sirens blasting in all directions; people running, covered in dirt and ashes; conflicting reports from television and radio reporters; and nationwide speculation about what exactly was happening. Fear ruled the day, chaos reigned supreme; and all were disoriented, confused and shocked with disbelief. We felt vulnerable, exposed, and defenseless. Inside Tower One there was little time for speculation, doubt, or disbelief. There were rumors that various floors were on fire and countless were presumed dead. Some turned television sets on and watched a surreal view of the horror that was happening inside. Some picked up their phones and called home, telling loved ones that they were OK, that emergency personnel were taking care of things, and that the worse was almost over.

But then, the second tower was hit, and our questions were answered, our speculations ended, and our disbelief and denial were given a mortal blow. Someone had awoken the sleeping giant, had pierced the heart of democracy, had violated our sense of security and our belief that “nothing like this can ever happen here.” Someone had proven the existence of evil beyond reasonable doubt. Someone had proven that there were monsters in the nation’s closets, and they had been waiting for the right moment. Plotting their grand entrance, counting the hours and the days, awaiting with great excitement for the banquet of blood that would soon be served on American soil.

And then our attention turned to the plight of those still inside: stockbrokers, office workers, maintenance workers, innocent bystanders, day care workers, preschool children, window-washers and more... Both women and men, old and young, single and married, American-born and those born outside of this great nation. We saw them scream from the windows, we saw them wave their arms to

get someone's attention, we saw them jump to their deaths in despair, we saw the debris and the rubble, we saw the gruesome sight to which one of our most impressive landmarks had been reduced. In short, we saw evil, darkness, despair, unbelief, and out-of-control hatred.

But, that's not all we saw that morning! We saw men and women courageously risking their lives to rescue survivors: firefighters rushing into the buildings, while most everyone else was racing out; police officers protecting and defending our rights, even as the towers came crashing down on top of them; medical responders, chaplains, and many other volunteers selflessly sacrificing their lives for the chance to rescue just one more person. I wasn't here then, but I hear that locally, many saw the deployment of volunteers to NY city and beyond, the tired teachers and hospital personnel revising evacuation plans and conducting emergency drills, just in case something like this were to happen here. And many saw additional security at the power plant, while the community turned to prayer and vigil for the victims, injured survivors, emergency personnel and their families. Many hugged their children a bit tighter, and many acted with great generosity either by donating blood, or by sending checks to care for victims and their families.

In the days and weeks after the attacks we saw air transportation halted, the activation of military reserves to ensure national security, especially at our borders, and we saw a national debate about what our level of response should be. Most of all we saw our anger. We became an angry nation, a grieving nation, a determined nation. A nation at war! We had become a much different people and we all had that spark of suspicion in our eye. We saw the enemy everywhere at the same time. We became a nation of watchers, and we began to pay a bit more attention to our neighbors, because, after all, anyone could be a terrorist and any American town or city could be the next target.

Fifteen years later, many have begun to forget. The images of the day have been taken off our televisions because experts believe they are too painful. Publishers of magazines have voluntarily kept their most gruesome pictures out of their publications, and memorial services have been poorly attended. We want to forget. We have covered our scars with make-up and pretended those scars are not still there. We even have an entire generation of children who were not alive then and who don't have the same emotional connection to the events of that day.

But, we can not forget! Christians are "Remembrance People." We are people in touch with our past. We celebrate what God has done for us throughout history. We gather every week and remember Christ's death on the cross for us, his lost sheep. Week after week we tell and re-tell to each other the great stories of our salvation. We are "Memory-People". We must remember September 11, 2001. And we must pray in gratitude for the selfless actions of brothers and sisters who risked and even lost their lives that day and in the last 15 years, as many of those first responders have died and continue to die of cancer. We must remember the thousands who died at the towers and we must commit to doing all we can do to eradicate hatred and anger from the earthly stage. We must remember the

thousands of young soldiers, both men and women, who died in Iraq and Afghanistan defending our freedom. We must remember the thousands of soldiers who are still trying to recover from wounds sustained while protecting us. And we must continue to pray for those soldiers who remain in Iraq and Afghanistan, after all these years of war and death.

We must remember, we must never forget! Let us pray:

Lord of all peace and compassion, we ask you today to guard and guide our country that in our search for security we may be mindful of the rights of others, especially the innocent, the weak and the disenfranchised. We ask you to eradicate all hatred from the human heart that we all may live in peace regardless of the color of our skin, our faith systems, and our political convictions. We pray today for a better world for our children and our children's children, and all the children of God. You have given us your Son to be the Good Shepherd and we know that he will never abandon us nor forget us. Comfort us today as we remember the great sacrifice many have had to make these last 15 years. Uphold those who work and watch and wait and weep and love for the sake of forgiveness, reconciliation, and world peace. Give us the strength to be agents of peace in our own lives. Help us to be mindful and grateful to those who place their lives at risk daily to protect our freedom. Bless the people and leaders of this nation and all nations, so that warfare, terror, and inhumanity may become things of the past. We ask you all of this in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen!

Now, please stand and join me in a moment of silence to commemorate our fallen and wounded soldiers who have made their ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.

SILENCE