

ARE YOU TERRIFIED?

We are in a state of mourning. And since one of the reactions to pain is anger, many of us are struggling with rage. Shock, rage, and mourning – all at the same time – are not easy to handle. Let us forgive each other for saying stupid things. It does not mean we mean them forever. Except in emergency, let us not commit or lock in to action or conviction hastily.

I have noticed over the years that when people are in mourning, two things are true:

1.) We want answers to all of life's toughest questions, but at the very time when there is too much emotion to think straight. The mind is skipping all over the place in great agitation and pain. Yet it wants to know – wants to make sense out of tragedy – almost desperately.

2.) We want our loved ones back. Rationally, irrationally, it doesn't matter. The loss is too great to bear, and we just want our loved ones back.

Sometimes a third factor is present: A very great desire to hurt what hurt us – to destroy what hurt our loved ones. Sometimes this evolves into a purpose, a cause, a determination to stop this kind of damage, if we can, so it will not happen again – not to us, and not to others either. A huge number of the great achievements and contributions of civilization have come from this kind of harnessed grief and passion: the March of Dimes, the Red Cross, lightbulbs, most of our laws, all of our safety programs. Much of the medical industry, much of religious conviction and commitment – a high percentage of civilization itself – is response and determination to minimize, control, or prevent the pain and damage of this life.

But how? “How” is what we band together for. And “how” is what we argue over, and often split back into warring factions over. If we could all agree on “the how” – which WAY – we would be a world at peace. There would still be much work to do, but we could work together. But that's the rub, isn't it? Shall we all be Hellenists, or Buddhists, or Muslims, or Jews, or Christians, or Republicans, or Democrats? ANY way – not just the best way, but ANY way – would work better than the dissension and hatred of our differing views, but we cannot agree.

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The only other hope is that we will learn to disagree in friendship – in a mature, controlled manner that allows freedom for us all to pursue and develop according to what we believe, and that even allows us to persuade each other, and switch allegiance if we want to, as long as it does no physical harm to others. But that has been a chimera so far. There are always factions among us afraid of freedom: those who feel they must coerce rather than persuade; those who will *make* us do it their way, even if they have to kill us to *get* their way. Sadly, some of them call themselves Christians. Sadly, some of them call themselves Muslims.

All of us are in shock. All of us are in grief. But some of us are not surprised. Some of us know it is a broken world. Some of us have known for a long time that there is a Battle going on here between light and darkness – between love and hatred. But even though we know it, we do not like to have to take it seriously beyond a certain point. We do not want the Battle to interfere with our pursuit of happiness. So even though the Battle goes on inside of us, and in our homes and companies and churches – even though we have prisons, addicts, homeless, hungry, and lonely all around us all the time, to remind us – we like to minimize the reality, pretend it does not exist, and keep things as pleasant as possible most of the time. We steel ourselves against the emotional response to all the need and suffering going on. We do it in order to survive – in order to keep our sanity. How many posters of how many crying, starving children do you see before you start to shut it out?

By the way, great good comes from enjoying life, from claiming the joy and the goodness, from concentrating on love and on purpose, and from being grateful for what God has given us as much as we can. That is what keeps all life here from sinking into darkness and despair. Only, we must learn to do that without minimizing the Battle – without forgetting or pretending that we do not notice the war between darkness and light, between hatred and love.

Strike a blow against terrorism: Listen to your wife; make love to your husband; have more fun with your children, but teach them they cannot always have things their own way. More children need to grow up in churches and surrounded by strong faith communities, and fewer in the hate camps of Palestinian radicals. And fewer in the fear camps of a vengeful hellfire Christianity.

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We all have a tendency, I as much as you, to want to get to the bottom of this business – to understand so we can resolve and prevent. Let us remember Isaac and Ishmael. Why is the Middle East always in such turmoil? What about the Crusades, and the Ottoman Empire, and the repercussions of the First and Second World Wars? Should we never have formed the State of Israel? Can we sit down with the terrorists and find out what they really want? Are we not skilled enough in conflict resolution to resolve all this misunderstanding? Or maybe there is some way to just kill them all. Maybe we should all start thinking more and saying less, at least for a while.

We argue a lot about the function of government, and what it should and should not try to do for us. Endlessly we debate states' rights and individual rights, and whether the government can justifiably subsidize this or that activity, or break up this or that monopoly in the name of the common good. But one thing I have never heard debated is a government's right to try to protect its citizens from physical harm – from criminals within, or enemies without. That is a government's first and most sacred duty. That is why government maintains armed forces and police departments. We might complain that the government does not adequately protect us from drug dealers, unsafe products, or bad drivers. That is more subtle, and we are supposed to make responsible choices ourselves. But we are not supposed to have to protect ourselves as individuals from organized physical violence, nor in our world can we. Each of us carrying a six-shooter doesn't cut it anymore. It never really did. Evil is bigger than that.

President Bush hates what has happened, and what it forces him into. But he says he has a job to do and intends to do it. He took an oath of office. He is Commander-In-Chief of our armed forces. He has sworn to try to protect us – like it or not – come what may. As he tries to do that, he will take a lot of flak and there will be great hue and cry against him, no matter what he does. But I hope it will not come from any of you.

On December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was bombed. When the dust had cleared, 2,403 of us were dead or missing. Another 1,178 were wounded. On September 11, 2001, we lost over 3,000 of our people. That is not a prank. It doesn't matter what kind of parental complexes led the terrorists to this attack. This is more than an attention-getting device. There is evil in the world. Sometimes it is evil to sit by and not try to stop it. Some of us remember Hitler and Stalin. But we also remember Chamberlain.

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This time we are not fighting an organized nation seeking overt domination. We are fighting anarchists – terrorists who have no regard for human life, including their own, and who are immune to values and rules and, whatever they may say, immune even to the precepts of their own religion. We have long known that they exist – that they have communities and training camps on the fringes of many nations who do not feel friendly toward us. We have every reason to believe that there will be further devastating attacks until we are destroyed ... unless we take strong steps to prevent it. Have some sympathy and support for those who carry this terrible responsibility. Many of them will hate what they must do at least as much as the whitest dove among us. But they have no choice – no other responsible choice – not even under God. And every new death, if they do not act, will feel to them like a murder laid on their doorstep. There is more than one way to have blood on your hands.

We will hear, especially in our wing of Christendom, a lot of talk about healing, forgiveness, compassion, understanding, reconciliation. Some of it will be profound, and we will agree with it because those are our values and what we all believe in. But some of us will forget the primary condition for new life: REPENTANCE. If those who want to destroy us do not repent, we go to war. When enemies repent, we get peace treaties. But thus far there is no honesty, no repentance, no honor in what we are facing. If you forgive the unrepentant, you side with evil. Even Jesus – who died for us all on a Cross that has become the universal symbol of forgiveness and mercy for any who will claim it, regardless of what they have been or done – even Jesus fixed it so that this forgiveness and mercy DOES NOT ACTIVATE in anybody's life UNTIL THEY REPENT. Show me any person, anywhere on the face of the earth, who has any comprehension, gratitude, or understanding of the significance of the Cross who has not personally repented. Nobody is ever converted until they repent! Forgiveness and reconciliation with God *await* them, but they are not activated. Forgiveness and reconciliation wait for the repentance.

Our culture, and even the religious/Christian part of our culture, has neglected study and contemplation – neglected our true precepts and roots – spending more and more time in shallow, cheap-shot slogans, and trusting in “being nice” rather than in sincerely turning personal will and life over to God. It is not an easy world. It does not heal with Band-Aids. We are always caught in Sin and Alienation because our world is not in agreement with or obedient to the will of God. We are

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surrounded with the uneasiness and *dis-ease* of it all the time. You cannot always be nice to your children or let them have their own way, or you are raising little terrorists. Why don't we just all love each other? Well, more and more we can, but only after we get a truer, deeper definition of love.

I have little time, and you have more important things to think about, but some of you need to know where these remarks are coming from. I was raised a Quaker. True pacifism is never passive, but we won't get into that. I came of draft age between the Korean and the Vietnam Wars. I was a deeply convinced and very serious Conscientious Objector. The Draft Board did not believe that Conscientious Objectors should exist, so they chose to fight the claim, and openly stated that they would make an example of me. During my freshman and sophomore years in college, I was in and out of hearings and then courtrooms. Doubtless it was a coincidence, but I was always ordered to appear in Long Beach during final-exam week at Redlands. I was screamed at, cussed at, called many dirty names. At the final trial, the judge told me verbally that he detested me and that he was sending me to prison. But he died of a heart attack before he had signed the papers. A Jewish judge inherited the case. He read the file, which no one else had done. He called me into court for the briefest procedure of that long two years, and said: "Young man, I do not agree with your position. But reading this file, it is clear to me that if anyone was ever a sincere Conscientious Objector, you are. Our laws allow this position. Furthermore, this should never have come to trial. According to law, the Draft Board is required to grant you the lowest status for which you qualify at this time, which is a Student Deferment." The gavel came down, and I have heard nothing further of the matter since.

But I have had a lot of thoughts since. I have had a growing gratitude for a country that defends religious conviction and freedom. I claimed it, but this country provides it, and protects that right. Since those early years, it has become clear to me that there are many situations in which there is no right and pure place to stand in a broken world. I have known many dear friends who have fought – some of them were wounded, some of them died – and they believed in God and tried to serve him every bit as much as I have tried to. I am grateful that there was no war going on when I was at the right age. My contemporaries were maintaining situations, but not fighting battles. At the time, I could not imagine that Jesus would ever permit a follower to kill another human being. But now I think it is just as difficult to imagine Jesus

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liking His followers to sit by while others die to protect them and their loved ones and their way of life. We are wrong either way. That is what it means to live in a broken world. And that, among many other reasons, is why we call ourselves a fellowship of sinners.

Our nation's leaders will take steps against terrorists and terrorism. Some of us will agree with what they do, some of us will not. Most of us will not have as much information as they will have. Like it or not, we will live with the results of what they do. And though it is not our tradition or way to follow our leaders blindly, yet we need to support them as much as we can, and trust them to do the best they can with who they are and what they know.

Some things I can promise you, whatever they do: It will *not* heal the brokenness of our world. It will *not* bring "Peace On Earth." It will *not* resolve or win the war between light and darkness on this planet. It will *not* win the victory of love over hate. And that means that, all along – even now as in the past, and certainly in the days to come – we will *all* still be caught in the warfare ... and we will all need to keep making our own decisions to live and labor for what we truly believe in. Each of us, in our own seemingly tiny place on this planet – with the people we know and work with and live with. And that is where this war is really won or lost.

And that means, or at least I hope it means, that we will try to remember who we are. I am not talking to the nation. I am not trying to influence national policy. I am not talking to the terrorists. I am talking just to you. To you who are part of this faith community. To you who are sworn followers of Jesus the Christ. We get lost and empty – alone and terrified – when we forget who we are. At a time like this, it is easier to look at the terrorists and what happened to us – to focus on how they live, what they did, what they may do. And soon we feel disoriented and helpless because we no longer remember who *we* are. We have values and beliefs of our own. We have a Lord whom we trust. We try to live and follow A WAY OF LIFE that is deep and true and meaningful – and powerful. Shall we let terrorists – or anybody else – take that away from us? Or cause us to change to a different WAY?

Strange thoughts go through our heads. I have email messages printed out as thick as a small book. Profound, beautiful, stupid, ugly, pathetic – all heartfelt. Is Islam really this bad a religion? Muhammad would not approve of much that Muslims do – any more than Jesus

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would approve of much that Christians do. We are talking about a new Pearl Harbor. Are we again going to persecute the innocent – the friends who care about us and think they are part of us – as we did the Japanese Americans? This is a good time to contact your Muslim friends. Let them know you are thinking about them. Ask if they are feeling safe. Make sure they know that they can call on you if they start to feel worried.

Israel has been struggling for years against Palestinian terrorists, yet they often seem to have a great sympathy and tolerance toward them, knowing full well that many Palestinians are not terrorists. Some Israelis are already saying to us, “You judged us pretty harshly all these years – see how you like it! It’s not as easy to deal with as you think.”

What seems so new and dastardly ... is also very old. In some ways, it just includes us afresh – in a terrible way – with what has been going on all around us all of our lives. We read about Bosnia and Poland and the Philippines and Indonesia; we hear about Palestinians and Iraqis and Cambodians – and almost everywhere else in the world – where people are not safe, where forces of anarchy disrupt those trying to keep law and order, where even children and women are not safe. Hundreds of people were killed in the attacks on our barracks in Saudi Arabia and our two embassies in Africa. This is not a new war. It has only come closer to home.

It doesn’t help, maybe, but we have rejoined the human race. And strangely, that brings new hope with it. This tragic attack also brings sympathy from all over the world. It may well cause countries everywhere, including Muslim countries – including us – to take new and clearer stances against terrorists and terrorism. We may find ourselves with new friends among the many Muslims in countries everywhere who believe in God and love and justice as much as we do. Unless, of course, we do something foolish enough to give them nowhere to stand except against us. Which is exactly what the terrorists are hoping for – a reaction on our part that will drive the moderate Muslims of the world into their jihad.

This is not a war between East and West – it is not a war between Muslim and Christian. It is a war in which those who love God, family, children, friends, and life enough to want God, family, children, friends, and life for others too *must* be on the same side – they must help each other get on and stay on the same side.

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Jesus' words sound very different this week, don't they? And suddenly we are reminded that He was not speaking from the white sands of a luxurious beach resort. He was not speaking from the security of the most powerful nation in the world, where people have so much luxury and leisure that they have nothing better to think about than their diets and their addictions, and where they spend more money on sports and entertainment than for God.

Jesus lived in occupied territory – caught between irreligious priests and Roman conquerors. There were terrorists called “zealots” back then, and Jesus refused to join them. In one of the great ironies of history, Barabbas was released and Jesus was crucified. The Romans dealt with terrorists, finally, by destroying all of Israel. Having tried everything they thought was reasonable, and knowing that the zealots were aided and harbored by the people, they finally got tired of the terrorist attacks and destroyed everything and everyone who did not run out of the country fast enough. No Jewish state or country existed anywhere in the world from the year 70 A.D. to 1946. Now one does, but it has infuriated Muslims everywhere. But all of us must find some better answer than the Romans found.

Jesus was a product of Jewish patriotism: His great sire David; the impossible battles that His people had won against great odds; Samson, Joshua, Gideon, and the Maccabees; the prophetic promises; the belief that odds do not matter if you trust enough in God. Yet finally, He was driven to a different answer and a different WAY.

If we kill Osama bin Laden and all his followers, will we have won? There are terrorist organizations and training camps all over the world. We have known that for years. If we destroy them all, will we have won? The Battle between darkness and light – between hatred and love – is bigger than that. It is also deeper than that, stretching even into our own hearts and lives.

Jesus knew that – realized that – came into deep awareness of that. And again this morning we heard the words He spoke in reply. Those words called all who would follow Him to a new WAY: into a Kingdom not of this world – into a Life ***in but not of*** this world.

Are you terrified? That is the purpose of terrorists. They do not know how or what to build, so they destroy. On some level, all of us are terrified. We do not want all that we have cared about and worked for

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destroyed. And we will stay terrified until we look away from the terrorists and back to Jesus. We will stay terrified until we remember who we are, and what we live for, and how. And then we will get back to doing that, for as long as we can, for as long as this world will let us – building, loving, caring. We will not be naïve enough to pretend that terrorists will be changed by our love. We will not be sappy idealists enough to suppose that forgiveness will change people who have not repented. We will never assume that we are above pain and destruction, or that our loved ones will ever be truly or finally “safe” in this world. But we will follow our WAY – the WAY of Jesus Christ our Lord – because that is our WAY now too. And we will not abandon that, or cease to live and work and sacrifice for it. And no terrorist will ever be able to turn us to hate. Because hatred is not our WAY. We do not owe any allegiance to terrorists. We owe all of our allegiance to Jesus, Lord and Christ.

Finally this morning: I think there is something within us that wants things to go back to how they were before Tuesday. We want the world to return to “normal,” forgetting that we lived where it was not normal. And we want the pain and sorrow to subside – for some resolution to appear that will allow us to feel okay again. Maybe we should not hasten to healing. Maybe we should keep away from too much comfort, and especially all false comfort. This time the heart needs to stay broken, and the reality of the Battle needs to sink in, deep and clear, where it will stay in our consciousness forever. Otherwise we will try to forget again, and go back to our pleasures and personal goals again. And we need to do that, only without ever forgetting. We are part of a community that is part of the greatest Movement and Cause ever to come to this planet. Sometimes in my own pursuits, I forget the cause of Christ. Some of you may be mature and loving by nature; I am not. I am not peaceful or peace-loving, or obedient, or holy – not easily or automatically – and especially not when I encounter evil. In my case, the evil outside calls loud and clear to the evil inside. I dare not get careless. I see them cheering as our hearts are breaking, and my old nature is ready to jump up and join the war for more hatred and killing. I don’t drink anymore. I don’t try to cut the pain anymore. I don’t seek comfort, or forgetfulness. I try to let the waves of anger roll over me. And I must remind myself over and over again: It is not our WAY. Whatever happens, whatever they do, my life belongs to Jesus – and this is not our WAY. Back to being who we are, where we are – back to building, and loving, and caring. The church is more important than ever. I love you more than ever. And because I trust and believe in the Christ of God,

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I still believe light will win in the end, and love will prove more powerful than hate in the end. And we will only see glimpses of it on this planet, in our lifetime. But that's okay. We are not here for very long.

With whatever time we have left, God help us to be faithful.

PRAYER

We have been at our prayers a good deal more than usual, O God. We have felt with greater passion and depth our need for You. We have felt with more empathy and compassion than usual the sorrow, fear, and anger of so many others. And we have known that they needed You too. And strangely, almost with a tinge of shame, we have realized that there is great blessing in this greater awareness.

Somehow those we have loved, we have loved more than ever. What is precious to us seems dearer than ever. Some of our problems and complaints have seemed to recede into the background, no longer looking very important – at least for a while.

And so, along with everything else, YOU have seemed closer, more important, and more dear to us than ever before.

Now we are hoping and praying that things will get better – that somehow You will guide our leaders into right and effective decisions and perspectives. So many times in our lives, and throughout all history, You have brought good out of evil. So we are hopeful again that new light will dawn – that all of us, individually and collectively, will be smarter and faster and more eager to do Your will ... and to live for light and for love, and to claim the LIFE You offer.

But Lord, may we keep the special awareness of these dark days – the deeper and clearer awareness of Your presence? Please?

Together, in the name of our Savior and Lord, we pray it, saying,

“Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.”