

*“September 11, 2004 -
A Memorial Day of Sadness and Challenge”*

This weekend we mark the 3rd anniversary of 09/11/01. It is a “Memorial Day” of sadness and challenge. I wrote this prayer in the days following:

“We pray for all who have died and for their loved ones who must bear the loss. We pray for all the rescue workers who continue the difficult task of recovering bodies from the debris.

We pray for our leadership, especially President Bush, that they may continue to lead with calm and deliberation. We pray that we may ‘take in’ the events of September 11, 2001 and the events to come with faith and with a gospel vision.

We pray that our nation and the entire human race will work to eliminate evil, hatred, and cowardice in our world through deliberate, well-thought out, and measured responses.

We pray that our responses will not be ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,’ but a response that rises above what was done to us, a response that brings an end to this kind of violence and does not become a reason for more.

We pray that we may remember that good exists in all peoples, nations and creeds, and that the deeds of a few are not the deeds of all.

We pray for Arab-Americans in our midst, both Christian and Moslem, who help form the beautiful tapestry that is America; that they may be assured of our love and support during these times.

We pray for our enemies. We pray for all who oppress us, that with God’s help we may experience justice, reconciliation and peace.

What happened to the citizens of the United States of America on September 11, 2001 happened to all the citizens of Earth, our global village. The ‘earth-shattering’ events of that Tuesday remind us, I believe, that we are at the point of human evolution in which we must see ourselves, not as citizens of specific countries or people of specific religions, but as ‘terrestrials’ – one people of one village.

There are no more national or religious borders. The only border is between good and evil.

As the leadership of the United States of America moves forward in response, I pray that they do not act alone, but as much as possible, move forward with other ‘terrestrials’ of good will on behalf of the entire village of Earth!”

On this 3rd anniversary of September 11, we are mindful that we have been roused. We have been shaken to the very depths. The whole framework of life was shaken. There was a shattering awakening. The horrific acts of September 11 have awakened us to the truth of ourselves. We have remembered who and what is truly important – as we experience a resurgence of love and commitment to family, church and the community. As we continue to move forward in these days, and to formulate a “War on Terrorism,” I would ask that you consider these thoughts:

1. We dedicate ourselves to rooting out evil. May we do so in keeping with the Gospel Message of Jesus – not seeking “an eye for an eye,” but in “loving our enemy and praying for our persecutors.” Let us continue to take the “higher ground” as we attempt to bring those responsible to justice.

2. In many circles of life, we hear arguments calling for revenge. We should keep in mind the advice of the old wise man, Tevye, from the musical “Fiddler On The Roof:” “If we keep seeking an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, very soon the whole world will be blind and toothless!”

3. As we attempt to root out the evil of terrorism in other places and in other peoples, we need to be willing to root out the evil within us. We must seek the grace and courage needed for self-evaluation. We need to be willing to ask the difficult questions: “Why do so many people, in other parts of the global village, hate us? What can we do differently? How can we be more engaged in activities to create a greater sense of cooperation and understanding on a global level?”

4. As we debate the ways in which to confront and end terrorism, we must remember that if a person or group of people come to a conclusion that is different from our beliefs or a policy adopted by the leadership of the United States, we should never brand those differing opinions as unpatriotic or disloyal. To call into question one’s loyalty to this country because of differing opinions is not a witness to the very essence of this great nation. Such labeling will do a disservice to this country and will weaken our efforts to bring terrorism to an end.

5. We need to rid ourselves of the stereotypes regarding the root cause of terrorism. Islam is not the cause of terrorism. The Middle East is not the cause of terrorism. The Arab population is not the cause of terrorism. Fundamentalism is.

We see a growing phenomenon of fundamentalism in Islam, in Christianity, and in Judaism. Combining religion and politics and approaching them fundamentally are causing our problems today. Seeing my group and myself as right and everyone else as wrong and having the need to forcefully and violently move others into my way of thinking and acting are the causes of terrorism.

The belief that uniformity brings unity causes violence. Forced uniformity creates a shallow and skin-deep unity that is just waiting to explode, more often than not, violently, when opportunity presents itself. We must strive for not just tolerance, but a radical equality and respect in which differences are accepted and celebrated. It is a unity created in the midst of diversity that touches the heart and soul that then brings an end to violence and a beginning of peace through justice. Theologian, Hans Kung, once wrote these haunting words: “There will be no peace among the peoples of the world without peace among the world religions. There will be no peace among the world religions without peace among the Christian churches.”

6). As we move forward in these years after 09/11/01, let us keep in prayer the people of Afghanistan, the people of Iraq, and all the Coalition Forces and their families. We pray in a special way for all who have died at the hands of terrorism.

May we not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. May we continue to pray and work for global understanding, and justice that leads to peace. May we not lose heart! May we never give up on the biblical challenge that we, as “terrestrials,” will, one day, turn our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks.