

A Monthly Message from Pastor Mike and Mandy

The Tenth Anniversary of 9/11 approaches. Our reminiscences of that day vary, but they have in common the deep pain and grief at the death of so many people, mostly American citizens, on American soil as the result of a carefully planned attack from the air. The wickedness that led the perpetrators to such acts of violence is hard to comprehend. This day of tragedy remains fresh in the minds of many. One can confidently assume that families still feel the pain of the loss of loved ones who died amidst such mayhem.

We remember the many that died. We remember the dedicated cadre of firefighters, police, rescue workers, and other heroes who risked their lives, some dying in the line of duty. We remember those who relentlessly sifted through the pile of concrete, glass, steel, and human bodies looking for survivors. Others in western Pennsylvania and Washington, D. C. did the same. We remember the heroes who performed individual acts of courage. We remember the unsung heroes whose names and brave acts are lost in death.

It was difficult not to feel anger and grief every time afterward when we saw pictures of the skyline of Manhattan with the two towers gleaming in the sun. “O beautiful for patriot dream that sees beyond the years thine alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears . . .” are words of *O Beautiful for Spacious Skies*, composed by Katherine L. Bates. What happened was not a patriot’s dream but a nightmare drenched in tears. The gleaming city without tears will only be realized in the New Jerusalem.

The lyrics of the hymn say more. They include petitions for God's grace and human fellowship; for the mending of our nation's faults; for a people strengthened in self-control; and for a liberty confirmed in law. These are all good things to ask of the Lord as we remember 9/11.

We Christians have particular perceptions to add to any reflection on this tragedy. We know that wickedness is present and active in this world and that there are hearts of darkness to use words from novelist Joseph Conrad. But, we also know that God is working among us. We are not so naïve as to think that we are protected from all danger. But wait! In *The Small Catechism* Luther says that God defends and protects us from all danger and evil. Luther was no fool. He knew that terrible things happen to people. He was in danger of his life many times from lightening, sword, illness, church, and state. What then does he mean? He means that God is present with us and will bring us safely to the Heavenly City. In the end we will reach our destination and live with God forever. We must not despair. Evil will not win the victory. In this, we Christians can be confident. We must remember the cross on Golgotha where all hopes and dreams appeared to have come to an end, but where in the midst of darkness, suffering, and death, the Lord God wrought a victory through His Son, Jesus Christ.

On 9/11 we will remember, celebrate our heroes, and grieve for the dead. But, most of all, let us remember the goodness of God that has blessed this nation abundantly and the mercy of God that despite sin, death, and the power of the devil will bring us to the other side of Jordan into the Promised Land.

We leave you with the words of another mighty hymn. *Lift Every Voice and Sing* which comes out of Afro-American experience, forged in slavery and oppression, but which all of us can sing and hear resonate in our hearts,

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by thy might, Led us into the light;
Keep us forever in the path we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee;
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world we forget thee;
Shadowed beneath thy hand May we forever stand,
True to our God, true to our native land.

Text: James W. Johnson

In Christ,

Pastor Michael Tavella and Pastor Amanda Grimmer