

# God Has Not Changed

Today's Gospel: Luke 15:1-10

September 15/16, 2001

**It may seem like it, but we haven't been reading a Tom Clancy novel.**

We haven't been watching Stephen Spielberg special effects.

We can't run the film in reverse and put everything back together again.

Over and over this week we have heard reporters ask, "How can we help? What should we do?"

**By now we all know the phone number to call to make an appointment to give blood.**

By now we all know the phone number to call to give money to the Red Cross.

We even know the number to call to give direct financial aid to the World Trade Center victims.<sup>1</sup>

But that doesn't seem like enough of a response.

The great majority of us want swift and decisive military action.

**But we will have to be patient -- and we will have to be determined.**

Because whatever we do, we have to do it **right** -- and we have to do it in the right **way** -- and that won't be easy -- and it won't be quick -- because this is the most complicated evil the world has ever faced.

**YOU, you who are gathered here today, have an especially great task before you. Each one of you. And you have enormous resources to draw on.**

All week I have been praying for you as much as I have prayed for the souls of the people on the airplanes and in the Pentagon and in the World Trade Center and for the rescue personnel and their grieving families.

I have been praying for each of you because there are many people in each of your lives who do **not** have the resources to draw on that you do.

And if you are going to help them get through this, you need to keep your heads and you need to keep your feet standing on the rock of your salvation.

And you need to speak up because you know the true answer to many of the questions people in your life are asking within your hearing.

**Where was God on Tuesday?**

God was at work in the firefighters and the police and the medical workers and the military personnel.

God was at work in the people lining up for hours to give blood.

God was at work in the airline passengers who knew they were facing certain death and who voted to attack the terrorist hijackers. (How wonderfully American -- they took a vote.)

God was at work in all those steel workers who just showed up to help.

Where was God? That's where.

**Then why didn't God just stop it?**

You know the answer to that one, too.

God didn't just stop it because He loves human beings so much He will never interfere with human freedom.

Sinful people have the freedom to choose to go on sinning.

Evil people have the freedom to choose to do evil.

But the consequences are eternal.

In the long run, good wins -- good always wins because God thrown His weight behind it.

But the price paid by the innocent is staggeringly high whenever evil people choose to do evil.

**In times like these, the battle between good and evil is thrown into high relief -- stark contrast -- we see it in black and white and on a global scale. But this battle didn't begin last Tuesday. It has been going on since the Fall.**

Maybe some people could ignore this battle before last Tuesday, or even pretend it wasn't going on. But it was.

And nobody can ignore it today. We have seen with our own eyes casualties of that battle.

Today I call on you to remember, whenever it looks like good has suffered a huge defeat, that in everything that happens, God works together with those who love Him to bring good out of it.

When we were in Israel last year, our family were the only Christians on the tour -- everyone else was Jewish.

We went through the Holocaust Memorial side by side.

But if our Israeli guide said it once, he said it 15 times, that although the Holocaust was a horrible evil brought upon the innocent by evil men, that out of it God brought the miracle of the modern State of Israel.

As you have heard many times, the Crucifixion was the darkest moment in human history -- but out of it God brought the Resurrection -- with forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life in Heaven for all who will come to Christ.

Remember: in all things, God works for good, together with those who love him.

I call on each one of you today to resolve to **be** one of those people who loves God and works with him.

**I also call on you to remember that the battle between good and evil is not a war between equals.**

The Resurrection was like the Union Victory at Gettysburg during the Civil War.

It was like the D-Day Invasion in World War II.

The fighting goes on, the suffering continues, blood is still spilled -- but the end result has been decided.

**So what do we do with the rage and grief?**

Well, not what the hijackers did.

We **don't** try to hurt other Americans whose religion or whose politics we don't like.

We don't deface American mosques or trash American 7-11s or harass little American girls wearing the head scarf of Islam or attack young American men on the streets who look like they are of mid-eastern descent.

We've all heard **talk** like that this week -- and we've all seen the **shameful** news reports.

That's just racism.

It isn't Christian. It isn't American. And we need to challenge it whenever we hear it or see it. Do not let such things be spoken within your hearing.

Give in to that and evil wins another battle.

I call on you today to remember who you are and what you stand for.

Remember what America means and that you are an American.

Remember the men and women who fought and died to forge and to defend the Bill of rights.

But most of all, remember that you are Christian. That is your primary identity. You follow Jesus, the Lord of Life, the Light of the World.

Turn that anger and grief into a sturdy determination to go on with your life and to live as one of the good guys.

Remember that sin is real, that evil is real, and that you don't want it to have a toe-hold of any sort in your life.

Turn away from everything in your life that you know is not pleasing to God.

Ask for forgiveness.

Walk with Christ.

**I also call on you to remember: Your well-being (now and always) is in God.**

If you have children in your house -- little children, teenagers, it doesn't matter -- let them know that you are not frightened.

Let them see that you may be sad and horrified -- but you are not anxious; you are not afraid.

This is especially important for parents to remember because your children's well-being is in you. They take their cues from you.

Turn to God for strength and courage and sturdy determination.

Tell your children to rely on Him.

Remind your children that yes, what happened is awful, but that we belong to God in Christ, and Heaven is waiting **for** us no matter what happens **to** us.

**I call on you to remember that death comes to everyone, Christian or not. But for Christians, death is not the tragic end of something beautiful -- it is the glorious beginning of something beautiful.**

Some of us -- like the people in the hijacked airplanes or people with a terminal diagnosis, know that death is coming very soon.

Some of us, though, -- like the people in the World Trade Center or the Pentagon -- will be caught by surprise.

But this is not something new since last Tuesday. Jesus Himself said, "Always be ready, because you don't know when the end will come."

So don't be frightened -- and let your children know that you are not frightened. You are a person of faith.

**And also, tell your children -- and your families and your friends who don't know God well enough to worship Him -- that these are not the moments when we doubt our faith. These are the moments our faith was made for.**

As St. Paul says, "If we Christians have hope only for *this* life, we are -- of all people -- most to be pitied.

These are **not** the moments when we doubt our faith.

Instead, these are the moments our faith was **made** for.

The storm has hit -- but our houses are built on the Rock of Christ.

Our hopes and dreams will not be swept away -- not even if we die.

Good wins. It always wins.

**And remember that yours is not only a God of Final Judgment -- He is also a God of patience and justice and love.**

The terrorists who brought us so much grief this week, serve a harsh god -- a false god -- **very** different from the One you serve.

When you heard today's gospel about the God of seeking love who turns things upside down looking for one lost sheep or one lost coin, you may have thought, "Boy, that's the last thing I need to hear today."

But it isn't. It is the **very** thing we need to hear today.

You serve the One True God who doesn't want one soul to be lost -- although some will be, through their own choices.

You serve the One True God who died for a sinful world in Christ -- and so who really doesn't want you to trade your eternal soul for something that, in the long run, isn't worth a pot of red beans.

**The thing to do today-- right now-- is to stand at the foot of the Cross and recommit your life to Christ. Ask His forgiveness for all those things in your life that you KNOW grieve God's heart and then turn away from those things. And then ask God to fill your heart with His Spirit ... His strength, His wisdom, His courage, and His determination.**

Good wins. In the long run, God's will **is** done -- on earth as it is in Heaven. Always.

We do grieve -- but not as those who have no hope.

In all things, God works for good together with those who love Him. So **love** Him -- and **obey** His Word -- and work **with** Him.

The Spirit of God casts out fear. So do not be anxious and do not be afraid. You have cast your lot with God.

Remember who you are. Yes, you are an American. But you are a Christian first.

Keep your head. Keep your feet planted on the rock of your salvation. Lift your eyes to God.

Together with God, we're going to get through this. By the time this is over, we will be a stronger, better, more faithful people than we were before.

America may be changed -- as the news reporters have been saying all week.

America may be changed, but God has not changed. God never changes.

As St. Paul says, "To the King of the Ages, Immortal, Invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

May God bless and strengthen each one of you. Because you're going to need it.

And God bless America. AMEN.

---

1. Just in case anyone reading this does not know those phone numbers, they are: To make an appointment to give blood: 1-800-GIVE-LIFE; To give money to the Red Cross: 1-800-HELP-NOW; To give money to victims of the World Trade Center tragedy: 1-800-801-8092)