

I agonized whether or not to preach on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9-11 this weekend – or not. The scriptures don't really possess that kind of focus, but it seemed wrong not to do SOMETHING to remember a day that radically changed our national consciousness and brought us, in many ways, to our knees. I found these 3 reflections to be helpful, and so I offer them to you.

"It's the grift, the racism and the ugliness – all of it – that's a threat," said Sheri Zachary, 55, whose husband (an Air Force colonel at the time) was in the Pentagon during the attack and was familiar with all the tactics, tribalism and ugliness of terrorists attacking the United States....

"The problem has become that the threat we were united against back then has become internal....It's going to take some time, it's going to take patience and forgiveness on the part of people..." Sheri Zachary said. "Everybody who unfriended anybody on Facebook, they have to let those people back into their lives. We have to repair those small things to begin healing our nation. It may take a generation." (Petula Dvorak, 'Our brief moment of national unity after 9/11 attacks was just that – brief. Can we ever get it back?' THE WASHINGTON POST, Sept 10, 2020)

"Bond traders at Cantor Fitzgerald peering into their computers, naval officers sipping coffee around a conference table, undocumented workers collecting dirty dishes at WINDOWS ON THE WORLD, an firefighters ascending smoky staircases lit by emergency lighting were not singled out for punishment that day. They suffered and died simply because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. The thought that death can visit you and me – as suddenly and as unexpectedly as it visited them – is something worth reflecting on. Not that we'll discover a satisfying explanation. It just is. Life is fragile. But God's love is strong. (unattributed from HOMILETICS ONLINE, Sept-Oct 2021, 5-6)

"When the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center came crashing down, one after another, suddenly the billions of dollars that passed through those buildings' computers every day meant little. What was truly important was the human lives lost and the vastly greater number of human lives touched by those losses. One image that was burned into the consciousness of many at the scene – and of those more distant as well, watching on TV – was the incredible sight of a man and a woman jumping together from the burning towers, hand in hand. Something about that particular image has continued to speak to people, in a way that's hard to put into words.

"Who were they? Friends? Lovers? Co-workers who barely knew each other? Or even strangers, who knew each other not at all, except for the bond of sharing a terrible death? Then there's the odd contradiction in what they were doing. On the one hand, there's the intimacy of that simple human gesture: holding hands. On the other, there's the horror of their grim suicide pact: choosing quick death by jumping from a hundred stories up, rather than the slow agonies of burning or suffocation. A documentary on the 9/11 attacks recorded the reactions of different people, recalling what they thought as they watched that anonymous pair, in person or on TV.

"To me," said novelist Ian McEwan, "it was just the bleakest image of the whole thing. What I saw was utter desperation....I found no hope in that at all. If there is a God, he's a very indifferent God."

Brian Doyle, another writer and a professor of English, had a very different reaction: "They reached for each other, and their hands met, and they jumped. I keep coming back to his hand in her hand.....It's the most

powerful prayer I can imagine --- the most eloquent, the most graceful....It's what makes me believe that we're not fools to believe in God." (also unattributed from HOMILETICS ONLINE, Sept-Oct 2021, p. 6)

Life is precious; life is fragile. But God's love is strong. May all who lost their lives be gathered up in the great, merciful arms of God, and may we be instruments of the peace of Christ to all -- in our families, churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues throughout the world. Amen.

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