
A Meditation for the 15th Anniversary Remembrance of 9/11

An Evensong meditation by Dean Sam Candler

A Remembrance of the 15th Anniversary of 9/11

I remember being Dean of this Cathedral parish fifteen years ago, during the week following September 11, 2001. At twelve o'clock noon, not even three hours after the tragedy, we gathered in this holy place for prayer, using a liturgy that we had quickly assembled. I remember that the only text I could come up with was Psalm 46.

*God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved,
And though the mountains be toppled into the depths of the sea;
Though its waters rage and foam,
And though the mountains tremble at its tumult.
The Lord of hosts is with us.
The God of Jacob is our stronghold.*

Three days afterward, on Friday at noon, this Cathedral of St. Philip witnessed one of the most powerful outpourings of faith, hope, tears, and prayers in our history. Over fifteen hundred people gathered here, and in the narthex and in the parish hall, for prayer and remembrance. We sang the national anthem. We prayed. We broke bread together.

As people streamed out of the church, a man came up to me, crying like most folks. He fell on me and hugged me, and he said, "I am sorry, I am so sorry I haven't been to church." Other folks are probably saying the same thing, "I'm sorry I haven't been to temple, or synagogue, or mosque." But they were in these sacred places on that Friday.

Five days later, on that Sunday, I preached a sermon titled, "*Out of Ashes, Hope*," which was broadcast all over the country on the radio series now known as "Day1." This afternoon, today, I want simply to repeat some words from that address. Today, fifteen years later, they still apply.

"Evil had its way on [that 9/11] Tuesday, but a new Great Awakening is rising. Out of those deadly ashes a new Phoenix of life is rising. Slowly and surely, a grand body of faith is growing; it will grow higher even than the World Trade Center.

And this body's base of operations will be the communities of faith across the world. Throughout history, God has been in the business of redeeming evil, of making whole that which is broken, of bringing life out of death. That is the business of communities of faith today.

This century brings us a different kind of war. It is not territory or land that is in dispute. There seems to be no self-declared and easily identifiable enemy. It will be a war, too, about what religion is. Is religion an engine of violence in the world, or is religion an angel of peace?

The world needs religion to stand for peace. God needs religion to stand for peace.

Again, this is not a war of Christianity versus Islam. It is a war within Islam, and within Christianity, and within every

religious system. It is a war against violence and extreme absolutism in any religion.

A battle against invisible and violent terrorism cannot be won simply by violent means. The way to overcome terrorism and evil in the world is to infiltrate those systems with the moral good and with peace. Against the virus of violence, infect the world with the breath of the good, the breath of the Spirit.

It is, unfortunately, not a battle that can be won overnight. It cannot be won with one major explosion like the explosions of Tuesday [9/11]. It is a long campaign, where little by little the right decisions are made, and where each small action is taken for the universal good.

... Our campaign will be like raising a child. One statement, one victory, one event does not shape the final result. It is rather a pattern of the good, a habit of the moral right, which shapes our future together.

... [Remember] the images from across the world during the days after 9/11: lines of people waiting to give blood, up to eight hours long. All sorts of volunteers yearning to be moving the rubble of the World Trade Centers. Parents hugging their children like they never have before. Indeed, the world had changed. A grand new body of faith, a great awakening [was] occurring.

And not just in the United States were the responses magnificent. Our Canadian neighbors were stirring. At St. Paul's Cathedral in London, the United States national anthem was sung for the first time ever. Across Europe, citizens observed a three-minute silence; motorists stopped their cars along the Netherlands expressways and stood still. School children in Bhopal, India—yes, the same Bhopal of tragedy several years previous—school children lit candles for peace. Palestinian children in Hebron lit candles. In Belfast, Ireland, thousands gathered in the public square. In Nairobi, people prayed.

A great awakening was occurring. Out of the horrific images of that Tuesday, God was producing fresh images of hope and courage, beginning with rescue workers and medical personnel, and spreading around the world. God was redeeming evil, God was bringing life out of death, just as God did in Jesus Christ, and just as God always does.

It does matter what religions believe in this day. It does matter what we believe. We dare to believe that the one God of the world is a God who brings life out of death; he is not a God of death. That is the truth that brings peace and righteousness, faith and hope to the world. We now are to be the givers of that life; and we will need one another, to do it.

There were ashes that day, ashes of death, and ashes of grief. There was sadness and deep pain. Evil had struck. There is war. But from these ashes, from this death and destruction, God is raising up new life and hope in us, and in communities of faith across the world.”

Those were the words I spoke fifteen years ago, but I believe they are still valid today. Today, I close my meditation, again, with the same refrain:

Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.

AMEN.

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