

Reflections on the Tenth Anniversary
Paul H Bea Jr
Service of Memory and Thanksgiving
Westminster Presbyterian Church
September 11, 2011

(Note: Larry Haywood to preach from Jeremiah 32:13, 5-8, 15. While under siege, Jeremiah agrees to purchase a plot of land at the command of God as a sign of hope in the promises of God for the future.)

Responding to Attack

That bright morning, for the second time in eight years, my office mates at the Port Authority's Washington Office and I watched on CNN as we and the rest of the world learned how the huge towers and massive complex were, shockingly, vulnerable.

The Trade Center was built by the Port Authority. It was our headquarters and a source of considerable pride. And it was gone. So were 84 of our employees, half of them first responders. So were thousands of others.

We have responded as a nation and as individuals. In some ways the responses have been troubling, especially at the national level. But not in all instances...and, to be sure, there also have been bright "points of light," to borrow a phrase.

Including the dedicated service and sacrifices made by our volunteers in uniform and in harm's way.

Larry asks, "What have we learned?"

That there is evil in this world? No, we knew that.

What I have learned comes from what I have witnessed in the inspired, individual and collective responses to what is for many of us a personal, and surely for all of us a national, tragedy.

I have seen how tragedy and the draining enervation that comes from deep, deep sorrow can transform grief into a level of commitment and energy, powered by a lifting spirit, that overcomes exhaustion and depression. I have seen deep hate inspire great love.

Can you imagine that for all their malevolent ingenuity the shrewd plotters would have foreseen this?

In 2006 I was invited to serve on the board of *Families of September 11*, which like other family groups in those first chaotic days was formed out of a desperate need for precious information and collective advocacy.

Saying yes to the invitation was an introduction to some remarkable people serving on the small board. Their lives took a direction not by choice. But how each of them responded was very much his and her decision. I only have time to tell you about a few of them, and only some of what they have done.

Carie Lemack's mother was on American Airlines flight 11. Terribly bright and determined, Carie moved to Washington to be a persistent, public conscience for creating, and answering to, the 9/11 Commission and she still dogs the government to fully implement those recommendations. Just this week I heard Co-chairmen Tom Kean and Lee Hamilton praise her efforts. She has taken on many projects but most recently Carie formed Global Survivors Network. She searches out her cousins-in-grief in London, the Mideast and other parts of the world, where their own losses come at the hands of extremists. She shows them they are kindred to Americans and that we have common cause. She has applied what she witnessed, and the stories of the people she has met, in producing an

Oscar-nominated short documentary on international terrorism, "Killing in the Name," about a Muslim family victimized by Islamic extremists. You will find it on HBO soon.

Donna Gaffney, child mental health specialist, and **MaryEllen Salamone**, World Trade Center widow, mother and educator, decided that children need not be the perpetual victims of September 11th and led programs to help them. More recently, with the support of our board and the cooperation of the New Jersey Department of Education, they worked with over 50 educators to develop an age-suitable way to present to students, for years to come, the events of September 11th and, importantly, the lessons to be learned. The result is a K-12 curriculum titled *Learning From the Challenges of Our Times*. The lesson plans are available, free and on-line, to anyone who wants them.

Don and Sally Goodrich lost their son Peter in one of the Boston flights that morning. Besides leading *Families of September 11*, Don's response, with Sally was to create a foundation in Peter's name...and in his name went to Afghanistan...the breeding ground for the hate that took his life. They went into Pashtun provinces, had schools built and have supported the education of boys

and girls. Sally made many trips to the region and showered their love on the children. Back at home they placed older Afghani students in secondary schools and colleges to give them the experience of an American education. The Goodrich house plays dormitory still to this day. Sally succumbed last year to the cancer that first appeared soon after September 11th. Everything that I have heard and read about her...and seen on video...and in Don's eyes...says that hers was a life and is a spirit that shines far brighter than the hot hate that stole their son's life.

(Pause)

I do not know these people by their religious or political views. I only know them by how they responded...guided by what they learned from the events of that day ten years ago.

If they are representative, then there are many others who emerged from this tragedy strong, with a faith in themselves and God, ready to respond.

No question, I have seen the Holy Spirit at work through the actions of people in their healing and understanding. Those Christ-like responses may not always be Christ-inspired...but that is okay. Mississippi's Governor Barbour tells of Mennonites, Jews, Muslims, and Christians of all sorts responding to the devastation wrought by Katrina—immediately and years after—without being asked. Maybe some of you went down there. All were welcomed, he said, and all are loved for their response.

Don Goodrich observed in an interview this week that he has difficulty listening to the unceasing reports about that day—as do I—or to hear it discussed in dispassionate, analytical terms: a timeline of events, complex geopolitics, or terrorism examined. Those are valid, he acknowledges. But for him—and I think for most of us—September 11th is personal.

He said, “there is something very much lost...remembering 9/11...when we don't remember the unique lives that were lost that day and the effect those lives had on the living.”

For me, it has been a remarkable thing to see the effect those lives—and their deaths—have had on us.
