

SEPTEMBER 11th – ONE YEAR ON

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September 11th was a nightmare experience ‘It was a terrible crime against America but it was also a crime against the whole world ‘Those who died included 115 nationalities, and over 250 people from the United Kingdom ‘Members of this congregation were in Manhattan at the time of the attack’ A year ago the words “God Bless America” came naturally to the lips of people all over the world.’

Of course we must not get this attack out of proportion ‘The eventual death toll of 3200 is well below that of several recent massacres, including President Assad’s killing 20,000 Islamic opponents in Syria in 1982, Saddam Hussein’s poison gas massacre of 8000 Kurds in 1988, the Srebrenica massacre of 7,300 Bosnian Moslems in 1995 or the Taliban’s massacre of 8000 Shia at Mazar –I- Sharif in 1998.’

But this was a ghastly act ‘The planes crashing home’ ‘The tiny ant like figures jumping into oblivion’ ‘Those huge towers imploding and collapsing’ ‘To anyone who saw it it was clear a new dimension of terrorism had begun.’

As days passed a flood of personal narratives, jarred, twisted, and invaded our feelings ‘The message “I love you” left on a husbands answering machine from a wife trapped in the burning building, the husband who called from the toilet in one of the doomed planes repeating those same three simple words, the heroism of the passengers on the 4th hijacked plane who with unspeakable courage fought the terrorists causing the plane to crash before it can hit its destined target, the White House or the Capital building ‘The banker who struggled down 50 flights of stairs only to discover that his mother and sisters were passengers on one of the hijacked planes’ ‘The heroism of the fire department passed into legend’ ‘300 died pouring into the buildings while everyone else was pouring out.’

Looking back through all that now that amid all the smoke, dust and horror of ground zero there were also signs of renewing grace ‘The heroic acts of compassion, the magnanimity of spirit of the blood donors, the candles honouring the dead, businesses caring for families of their lost loved ones, and all those reminders of basic human goodness in the hearts of ordinary people ‘There was some grace coming out of that terrible moment.’

Now its one year on ‘Where are we now, what are we to say, what conclusions are we to draw? Firstly unmistakably clear is the utter unacceptability of terrorism and the need to unite the world community against it ‘September 11th illustrated the alarming potential for terrorism in a modern world ‘Small numbers of fanatical people have the ability to inflict appalling destruction upon the innocent ‘The first conclusion is simple, terrorism is unacceptable, no nation can be allowed to condone it, the world must unite against it.’

Now that brings me to the second point ‘September 11th was the most vivid reminder you can imagine that no part of the world can isolate itself from any other ‘The reason September 11th could happen is that we have built a world where we have torn down barriers, collapsed distances and spread information ‘And the UK and America have benefited richly - look at how our economies have performed, look at the advances we have made in technology and science ‘This new world has been good to us, but you can't gain the benefits of a world

without walls without being more vulnerable 'September 11th was the dark side of this new age of global interdependence 'If you don't want to put those walls back up, and we probably couldn't if we tried' And if you don't want to live with barbed wire around your children and grandchildren for the next hundred years, then it's not enough to defeat the terrorist 'We have to make a world where there are far fewer potential terrorists and more partners' And that responsibility falls primarily upon the wealthy nations, to spread *the benefits and shrink the burdens.*'

I believe those are two great responses we have to make to September 11th 'How have done? Is the world a safer place for the innocent than it was a year ago? Well in Afghanistan we has had regime change 'But the country is still desperately insecure 'Osama bin Laden is still at large and al-Qaeda still a threat 'The now there the possibility of an attack on Iraq.'

It is extremely difficult to judge here what the dangers are 'No evidence has been presented that Iraq had involvement in September 11th 'We have little idea what weapons they possess or what threats they pose 'In essence we have been told hardly anything 'But some of the risks are clear 'I personally do not doubt the ability of the United States to remove Saddam Hussein and probably quite quickly 'But how many casualties there will be no-one can tell 'With nothing to lose there clearly is a danger that Saddam Hussein will use his chemical and biological weapons against Israel who could respond with a nuclear attack 'Though Saddam might be removed quickly, how quickly could a secure government be put into place? Having gone into Iraq how long would it be before we could leave? What effect would a unilateral American attack have on the wider stability of the Arab world? Here we must all wrestle with what is the right way forward.'

The great gain that September 11 brought is that it helped forge a coalition against terror that had Russia, China and almost the entire Arab world on America's side 'That coalition is crucial to the global campaign against al-Qaeda'. The effect of a unilateral American attack would be to destroy such a coalition 'It might possibly remove one threat to western interests 'It would certainly generate another.'

My own view is that a unilateral attack on Iraq would be unlikely to contribute to a more secure world 'If any such attack does take place without a clear United Nations authorization I do not believe that British forces should take part.'

And then what of the second question 'How far have we to go in breaking down the divides of poverty and injustice which make our world so unstable 'Preaching recently in Washington national Cathedral William Sloane Coffin said this:

"President Bush rightly spoke of an "axis of evil" facing our world today "but it is not Iran, Iraq and North Korea" It is "environmental degradation, pandemic poverty, and a world awash with weapons.""

Over the last six years, approximately 25,000 people have died from acts of terrorism, worldwide 'Over that same period, 52 million people have died from preventable hunger; about 24,000 people per day 'How much would an Iraq war cost? Who knows? \$100 Billion is one estimate 'What could you do with 100 billion dollars? How many schools could you open? How many hospitals could you staff? What resources could we put into peace-making?

I had hoped that one of reactions to September 11th would be the recognition that if you want to reduce violence in the world we need with a sense of urgency to reduce the tensions and tackle the underlying disparities that poison our life together ‘But look at the World Summit ‘No new commitments on overseas aid ‘No new money to tackle world debt ‘Nothing at all on HIV/Aids ‘Paul Ladd, Christian Aid's head of policy says this ‘Political leaders have made it clear they lack the vision and courage needed to tackle the problems of poverty and environmental degradation.’”

We are one year on – but are we one year forward? So in this house of God this morning let’s ask ourselves this question ‘Is there a word from the Lord for us as a nation and as a world?

I believe that word is that’s its time for a profound rethinking of the values by which we live ‘Maybe we should be hearing the prophetic word that Isaiah gave when “Is not the fast that I choose to lose the bonds of injustice, is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house” ‘Maybe we should be hearing the words of Jesus “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.”’

Maybe we should be saying to Lord, forgive us where we have not fed the hungry ‘Forgive us where we have been intoxicated by violence have relied upon military might’ ‘Forgive us for forgetting that it is not by might, nor by power, but by thy Spirit.’

I think we need a revitalization of our life. Wasn’t it Harry Emerson Fosdick who asked, "God of grace and God of glory, on thy people, pour thy power"? That’s what I’m asking for ‘What we need to do is to re-prioritise the values by which we live.’

Martin Luther King used to like to tell a version of the old Greek story of Odysseus and the Sirens ‘The Sirens had the ability to sing so sweetly that sailors could not resist steering towards their island ‘Many ships were lured upon the rocks, and men forgot home, honour, and duty as they flung themselves in the sea to be embraced by arms that drew them down to death ‘Odysseus determined not to succumb to the Sirens’ At first he decided to tie himself tightly to the mast of his ship while his crew stuffed their ears with wax ‘But finally he and his crew learned a better way to save themselves ‘They took on board the sweet singer Orpheus, whose melodies were sweeter than the music of the sirens’ When Orpheus sang, who could bother to listen to the sirens?

Today in a world full of sounds of war and discord our hope is in a sweeter music than the siren calls of violence. I know of one place only to turn for that ‘God of grace and God of glory, on thy people pour thy power.’

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