

“Making Sense of the Senseless, Again”

Psalm 147:1-11

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It has been compared to Pearl Harbor, only worse in the number of fatalities. The attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon last Tuesday shocked and temporarily paralyzed a nation. For most of us, the only surprise was when and how it was done. Many have lived in fear of a terrorist attack of this magnitude for years.

You can tell a nation has been stunned when citizens in remote parts of the country cry over the loss of people they never knew in places they have never been. On Tuesday, the victims in those planes and buildings were part of our extended families and Washington and New York were just around the bend. Their pain was our pain and their loss is ours, too. For you see, those hijacked planes pierced more than three buildings. They ripped through the heart and soul of America.

How do you make sense of the senseless? How do you explain the actions of suicide bombers who are willing to kill thousands of innocent men, women and children? I don't know about you, but I can't. I would not even begin to analyze how they think and explain why they do what they do.

However, there are some things I know and I want to share them with you today. **First of all, I know that evil is real.** On Tuesday, our President said, “Today, we saw evil.” Of that there is no doubt. As surely as there is good in the world, there is also bad. One of the first stories in the Bible focuses upon jealousy, hatred and violence (Genesis 4:1-16). It is the story of Cain killing his brother Abel.

Secondly, I know that God abhors evil. Down through the centuries, people have asked, “Why is there evil in a world created by a loving God?” Without any reservation, I can say that it is not here because He wants it. Instead, it is here because God created man with the freedom to make choices. He then gave man a spirit capable of receiving wisdom and guidance from Him. It was God's hope that man would seek and do His will whenever he had a decision to make because He would be faithful to guide His children down the right path.

However, God's influence is not the only one pulling on man. There is an evil influence in this world that tempts us to ignore God's will and choose bad over good. The choice is ours, and regrettably, many choose evil. Make no mistake, though. God is not responsible for man's inhumanity to man and is grieved beyond words over what has occurred.

Thirdly, I know that the consequences of evil are devastating. Repeatedly, the Bible tells us that sin kills. It always brings death and destruction.

“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted of evil nor does He tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death” James 1:13-15.

We saw the fulfillment of this scripture in Littleton, Colorado, Jonesboro, Arkansas, West Paducah, Kentucky, Pearl, Mississippi, and Springfield, Oregon. We saw it in Kosovo and Bosnia. We saw it six years ago in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and now New York and Washington. Surely, we have seen enough to understand.

Fourthly, I know that God wants to help us in times like these. I could read hundreds of verses that that would assure us of this fact. One of my favorites is Psalm 147:3. “He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds.” Another is Matthew 5:4, “Blessed are they that mourn, for they will be comforted.”

When we cry, God cries. When we hurt, God hurts. He feels our pain. He does not stop there, though. He does more than empathize with us. He walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death and offers us strength, courage and hope in our time of need. What a difference His healing Spirit makes. Where would we be without Him?

I have always appreciated the promise of Romans 8:28. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” This verse tells me that not everything that happens is good or God’s intentional will, but He can take the most devastating event and make good things come from it. He is not a helpless victim of tragedy as we are. He will have the final word and it will be good. What a difference His transforming Spirit makes. Again, where would we be without Him?

As most of you know, I was away last week preaching a revival. I stayed in the home of some dear friends, Al and Lisa Blakley. Outside their home is a lake with a beautiful water fountain. Each day I would walk or drive by that fountain and look at it. On Tuesday, I saw something that no other day revealed. I saw a rainbow. What a powerful symbol of hope and strength it was.

I know that we must not seek revenge in our pursuit of justice. What should our response be to this despicable act of terrorism? I would not begin to speculate. People much more knowledgeable than I must decide that, and for them I pray.

I know there is a difference, though, between revenge and justice. The former is destructive and the latter is constructive. Evil people need to be held accountable for their actions and everything needs to be done to see that they don’t hurt more innocent people.

However, everything also needs to be done to make sure we don’t let hatred and revenge control us and dictate our actions. Justice is an honorable goal. Revenge is not. Justice will make the world a better place. Revenge will not.

I am haunted by the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “An eye for an eye leaves everyone blind.” I pray that whatever we do in response to last Tuesday’s attack will give us a clearer vision of our mission and purpose in the world. May God help our leaders as they make crucial decisions.

I know that we need each other. Let me share with you something I noticed last week. No one wanted to be alone Tuesday, and quite frankly, I met no strangers that day. Everywhere I went, people were talking, crying and hugging as if they were family. That spirit of camaraderie has not waned since Tuesday, either. Actually, it has grown stronger.

As I read in one editorial, “For a moment this week, America unlocked its gates and became one community, coping with the same tragedy, searching for answers. Collectively, our children saw us weep and rage. Now they need to see us sustaining that bond by transforming sidewalk conversations with neighbors into ongoing dialogues and by recognizing that a world unsafe for one child is a world unsafe for all children.”

I know that we need to be good to our Arab citizens and neighbors. It appears that Osama bin Laden is responsible for this attack. To label all Arabs evil because a few are is like labeling all Americans evil because Timothy McVeigh was. You and I have

Muslim friends and neighbors who love this country and are making it a better place to live. We must not let this attack cause us to treat them disrespectfully or cruelly.

Returning home this week, I listened to several talk radio programs. I was deeply moved by the Muslim listener that phoned in and said with great emotion, "On Tuesday, I fall to my knees and cry. I've never seen anything so bad. I love America and am so sorry." God help us not to be prejudiced.

There is one final thing I know that I wish to share with you. **I know that true security is found only in a relationship with God.** We are vulnerable and life is fragile. What man builds can be destroyed along with those who use it. Buildings topple but the Kingdom of God does not. It is eternal.

It is also healthy, wholesome, good and strong. It provides the best that life has to offer and comfort when life has not offered us the best. You can be a part of that Kingdom today by acknowledging your need and asking the Lord to come into your heart. Then you will be able to say with confidence and peace, "Yea, tho I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." I hope you will make this decision today and let us welcome you into an eternal family of faith.