Newsletter Column,
The Rev. Paul Howe L'Herrou, 9/11/01

FOR THE TIME BEING

What a shock this has been. The following words are taken from Tuesday's vigil service in the wake of the terrorist attacks:

I feel in myself and I sense among others a feeling - as if the ground has been knocked out from under us. Our sense of basic trust and basic security has been betrayed - when some group of people can - on such a large scale - invade our airliners, in which we already know our vulnerability, and use those airliners as vehicles to smash into the buildings where untold numbers of people carry out their normal working lives.

I feel in myself and I sense among others that our basic faith in humanity has been shaken. Can I continue to trust people who have different beliefs than mine? Can I continue to trust people who I know nothing about - who board an airplane with me, who drive in the next lane of the turnpike? Yet, I know that the worst thing that could happen would be if the terrorists were successful in instilling ongoing fear and destroying my basic trust in humanity, which is a cornerstone of our religious faith. Let us find strength in the Spirit of Life, in the source of all - which is found in the human heart.

I feel in myself and I sense among others, feelings of outrage and beyond that simple rage!! - against those - and who those are, we know not - rage that seeks outlet in retaliation and revenge. Let us acknowledge that rage. It cannot be repressed. Yet, let us know that we must not let it lash out indiscriminately. The energy of anger and rage must be channeled - first to do what we can for the victims and the victim's families. And, then in ways that will be helpful to the recovery of a world where all of its people can be safe. In this terrible time we seek the grace which will sustain us and help us to face the terror of this day and the grace to help us to respond in ways which are most creative and healing.

At a time such as this, let us not succumb to prejudice or stereotyping. We do not know who is responsible for this immense tragedy. What we do know is that every religious movement has extremists, extremists who will resort to terrorism. There are many, many Moslems who are as horrified as us, who are as revolted as us at the actions of these terrorists. Islam is a very broad religion, in many ways quite similar to our own religious tradition, with room in it for very many kinds of belief and approach to life. Islam can be very humanistic and caring for human values. Let us not allow ourselves to stereotype all Moslems. Let us not increase the prejudice which already exists against Arab-Americans and against Moslems in this country and abroad. Let us remember our First Principle as Unitarian Universalists, which is to affirm and promote - The inherent worth and dignity of *every* person.

The most intense of the feelings, which have washed over us, is an overwhelming grief for all the innocent victims of today's attacks and for their families. Those whose lives were used to attack a way of life in the most horrifying way imaginable. There comes a time when there is nothing else to do but to give way to grief, to let loose the tears and let them flow.

Faithfully,

Paul

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