

**"The Enemy is Hatred and Intolerance: Remembering September 11"
September 16, 2001
First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio
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September 11, 2001; Where Were You When the New Century was Christened With Blood?

Where were you when you heard the news?
About the Lexington Bridge? About the Alamo?
Fort Sumter? The "Maine"? About the "Lusitania"?
The gas of WW I? About Pearl Harbor? Hiroshima? Korea?
The shooting of JFK? Bobby Kennedy? Martin Luther King?
Vietnam? Kent State? John Lennon? The Gulf War? Columbine?
The Bombing of the Twin Towers and the Pentagon?

The first war of the new millennium bathed us in blood
and gave us an invisible enemy that personifies hatred and intolerance.

The scenes are now permanently etched
like a nightmare of a movie
as we collectively screamed when the first tower fell.

We did more than scream, remember?
a thousand hands went up
it was on the news
a thousand hands went up
to stop the world from collapsing
but it did no good.

It was as useless as prayers to a deaf God.

We watched in videohorror
over and over that plane flew into that tower
over and over
We mentally and emotionally counted the number of people
who must have died at that instant
then those who that died in free fall outside the burning building
then those who perished in rubble from hundreds of stories to the earth.

And even if we didn't know that we knew anyone
we knew that we must know someone who knew someone
who was crucified
on a steel beam
for the crime of being an American.

I wondered if the terrorists were praying to the same God that the passengers were when they saw that they were to become human bombs
And I wonder what that God could have said to comfort them.

And what God were we praying to on the ground,
after the twin towers of Babel fell
just like in the Bible?

The Tower of Babel story tells us that everyone spoke the same language
and so were able to accomplish great feats of building as they began to
build a high rise that would eventually reach Heaven.

God could not let that happen for some unknown reason.

So God came down and confused us by making us each speak a different
language, so we wouldn't understand each other.

But O God, we need to understand each other;
give us a universal language for this new millennium,
even if it competes with the ancient ways.

So we pay the price these millenniums later.
Gee, thanks, God.

There is so much violence.
Both all too real and on the screen

The Twin towers of Babel World Trade

Hate and Fundamentalist Intolerance
brought down a wall of the pentagon filled with hundreds of people,
but at least it could be considered a military target,
but two skyscraping, heaven or hell scraping towers filled with thousands
of people working for a living
None of whom I would wager
ever did anyone any harm,
especially far over the sea
in the desert of hatred and intolerance

But the Bible says that the sins of the father (and mother, I assume)
are visited upon the children for many generations,
and so that is how long hatred and intolerance must last as well I guess.
Again, gee thanks God.

It never seemed fair to me
but I read my history
and the Bible seemed proven right.

The ancient battles in Northern Ireland and in Jerusalem and now in New York City
exhibit ancient hatreds

that seem too strong to break,
to deep for love's surgery, to sock for love's antibiotics,
for tolerance or understanding.

Religion sometimes seems to cause more hatred than it's worth
God sure seems to play both sides for fools
and religious wars of fool's errands.
Perhaps the messenger should be killed
perhaps the message that the human messenger brings is not THE TRUE ONE!

(And now in the Jewish Tradition, I now argue with God)

Forgive my cynicism, God,
my un-or dis-belief
my skepticism of your infinite goodness, love, and omnipresence
when someone claiming to be one of yours
murdered thousands of people in one hour.

Forgive me if I question the wisdom of a day of prayer
when we don't seem to agree on to just exactly to whom or what we are praying.
It looks like such good PR, God,
clever of you to have a Christian, a Jew and a Moslem
praying together in a national cathedral
Where one of my Seminary professors is now the minister there.

Forgive me if I ask a stupid question,
but where were you when those people on the three airliners were getting
ready to become human explosives,
or the thousands of people calling your name, no screaming your name as the
stairways a hundred flights up filled with smoke and death?

IS this the Tower of Babel Story?
Where you, in your infinite wisdom. cursed us who were building
perfectly good skyscrapers in the promised land of milk and honey
by confusing us with different religious language
so that we could not understand each other anymore?

God bless America?
What does that mean exactly?
We know from your Bible stories that you can be a pretty vindictive God.
That you told us to wipe out the Canaanites,
and later the native Americans, the Mexicans, the Aztecs, thje Incas,
because they lived on our promised land.
Wasn't it Bob Dylan that wrote that protest song about war
and thinking that God is always on our side, just like the enemy believes?

It's the Tower of Babel Story, isn't it God?
Where humanity all spoke the same language
and got together to build the tallest buildings in the world;
Indeed, we will call them World Towers.
And verily there were many there in those towers,
many thousands and all spoke the same language.
I've been trying to figure out why that bothers you so, God.

The Insurance companies still believe in you God; and they will not insure
against you, against what they call²acts of God or War.²
Because you can't measure the risk, of course, of acts of God or war.
But the towers and the people therein were insured, never suspecting that
"acts of God or War" would be what brought them all down,
all that steel and glass, all those computers and fax machines. File
cabinets and untold reams of paper and thousands of human bodies, blood and
sinew, arms and legs.
It was the fire next time, by God.
It will be a while before rainbows will ever be bright enough again
to wash away the horror,
the grief as deep as the grand canyon and twice as wide.

What have we done Lord, that was so grievous in your eyes
that you would smite us like this?
Are you not on our side anymore?
Have you taken back the grant for the promised land?
Are we no longer the true chosen people?
We knew you had given up on Jews long ago.
But tell us lord, who is the Hitler you have sent to punish us this time?
Which religion have you now favored?
Just exactly what lesson is it we are supposed to learn?

Why do you show me a mirror
when I ask to see you?
Why do you hand me a history book
when I ask why this is happening?
And why do you point to those shelves full of holy books
when I ask you which is true?

Why do give me, a liberal democrat, anti-Vietnam activist, and UU preacher
such a feeling of patriotism in this time that calls for us to be unified
that makes us wave our flags like it was the fourth of July in Small town
America?

We pray without ceasing, we pray though full of doubt,
perhaps because someone else may find comfort, perhaps even Humanist us.

We are not atheists in foxholes, but sometimes we are atheists in church, because - because the religious relational urge is deep within. O Lord, I often suspect that some preachers pray as a sneaky way of saying something they want the congregation to hear that they might not be able to say straight to them.

O God or Goddess, Gods, Goddesses, Spirit Holy and Great, Jesus spirit or Buddha or Mohammed or Moses or Zoroaster or million other names known and forgotten; If you exist, I'm talking to you, we all are; give us courage to face the unknown faith that love will conquer hate, that tolerance must become a sacred law, that we must take each other's hands, that we will be full of hope because we believe in the transforming power of love under many religious guises as well as purely secular ones.

And if I should lose Pascal's wager and you don't exist, then talking to myself and this beloved congregation, gathered for religious purpose with many different beliefs about you, will have to do.

To what I believe is the God/goddess, Holy or Great spirit within us all, inspire us to love without ceasing and to sow love where there is hatred, tolerance where there is intolerance.

May the one-ness of all, the spirit of life which runs through the thread of all religion, the At-One- Ment that Jesus talked about in his bringing love as the most important thing on earth and within the human heart, inspire us, as individuals, as a congregation, as Americans, as world citizens, bring peace to us and the world.

Even if we have to defend ourselves, let us continue to value each life dearly, and may we somehow try to do that strange thing Jesus taught, to love our enemies.

And let us be extra careful who we decide our enemy is and not blame one religion or one culture.

There are mistakes enough to go around for all of us.

Our hope is one of our history and religion's power for good over the potential for evil in both government and religion, and in the power of love to overcome hate.

May our religion be all religion, our citizenship an interdependent world.

May these many deaths inspire us to work toward world peace, even if it mean war first,

to share the riches of our country,

and to have the courage to be patient

and to find ways besides violence and continue to preach love and be tolerance.

May these events remind us that any day may be our last

and of the importance of our loving relationships
with each other, our family, our country, our world.

Prayer:

For peace in your country
For the victims of violence everywhere
For those struggling for peace and justice
For churches in conflict situations
For a world without war and violence

Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth,
Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust.
Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace,
Let peace fill our beings, our world and our universe.
Amen.

(World Prayer for Peace from the Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches)

Closing Words:

(from Emily Greene Balch, Nobel Peace Prize winner)

"We have a long, long way to go. So let us hasten along the road, the roads
of human tenderness and generosity. Groping, we may find one another's
hands in the dark."

Affirmation (for closing):

by Leonard Mason

We affirm the unfailing renewal of life.
Rising from the earth,
and reaching for the sun, all living creatures shall fulfill
themselves.
We affirm the steady growth of human companionship.
Rising from ancient cradles and reaching for
the stars, people the world over shall seek the ways of understanding.
We affirm a continuing hope
that out of every tragedy the spirits of individuals shall rise and build a
better world.

Shalom and Saalem (Arabic for Peace)