

## **Lectionary 24 B 2021**

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

September 12, 2021

Occasional: Anniversary of 9/11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

This weekend, we remember the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. We remember our losses. And not only do we remember the loss of individual lives, but we ponder all that Americans have collectively lost in terms of our daily lives and our national ideals and our national identity. We still deeply feel the pain and the trauma.

Whenever I am getting off an airplane after a long journey, and I walk through that retractable tunnel that they call the jet-way, and I emerge into the terminal. And as I walk those steps, I always fantasize that someone will be there in the boarding area to meet me. I will come off the plane, and someone will be excited to see me, waving and smiling, and will run up to hug me. It used to be the case that friends and family could go through security without a boarding pass so that they could meet a person on an arriving flight, or they could escort a person to the boarding area, and wait with them there until it was time to board. You can still meet arriving passengers in the baggage claim area, outside of security. There are powerful emotions that accompany our comings and goings, our arrivals and our departures. And it was nice to be seen off and to be welcomed. And it was nice to see it happening to others. But that's all gone now. Most American airports were built in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and they were not designed for the levels of security needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So the airports themselves have become mazes of lines and barricades and hallways that make travel less joyful and more like prison.

And so at the airport, when I am required to take off my shoes, and walk along dirty floors in my socks, and then get to the other side— where there are no chairs so that I can sit down to put on the shoes that they made me take off— it is in the airport where I have my darkest thoughts about the 9/11 terrorists. That they have permanently taken some of the goodness out of my life and replaced it with humiliating, bureaucratic, insipid, dingy prison inspections. Of me. And of little old ladies going to visit their grandchildren in Oklahoma. And I want someone to pay for what has happened to me and to my civilization. I want them to pay a very high price, a very high and personal and painful and humiliating price for what they have done to me and to my civilization.

I don't take airplanes very often, so I don't have those feelings very often. But they are still there. And they get triggered every once in a while. That is, I am told, the nature of trauma. That it haunts a person, and that the emotions of the original pain can be triggered by various kinds of things. For me, going on a plane trip is my trigger.

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11 is probably a trigger for many of us. Certainly, we can watch any number of TV shows, movies, and documentaries and re-live the shock of that September day. I believe that this anniversary is more painful because of the coronavirus pandemic and because of the recent conclusion of the war in Afghanistan. The longest war in American history, which itself triggers the trauma of Vietnam and Saigon for those of us old enough to remember those events.

In 2006, our denomination published a new hymnal, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. It was 28 years since its predecessor, the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. And it was five years after the 9/11 attacks, with George W. Bush in his second term in the White House, and with the United States deeply embedded in its second war, the war in Iraq. I know that I talk about hymnals and worship books a lot. That's because unlike the Bible, they change with the times. And they reflect more than theology. They disclose how Christians feel and act at certain periods and in certain cultures. They are expressions of institutions and identity and culture. So we got a new hymnal in 2006, and just this year, 15 years on, we got a new supplemental hymnal, *All Creation Sings*.

You can see the effect of 9/11 in our hymnals. Notably, there is a new section of songs called "Laments." A lament is a song which asks God for mercy and for healing. But it expresses sadness and loss, and the only hope is that God might do something. Traditional Lutheran hymns are heavy on what God has done for us. And perhaps on how we ought to respond to what God has done for us. But this is a different kind of hymn. It is inspired by the psalms of lament, which are a kind of psalm within the book of psalms. And the Bible even has an entire book of laments, said to be authored by Jeremiah, who saw his city and his temple destroyed by a foreign army. The biblical book of Lamentations. A lament just sort of puts it all out there. It doesn't have a lot of shoulds and oughts. It just expresses tragedy. It's not traditionally very Lutheran, because Lutherans want to hurry up and talk about God's goodness. But it is very human. And it is very biblical.

In the front of the hymnal is where I really see a lot of changes. There are new prayers for the nation. In the green book of 1978, the prayers were prayers of a privileged and proud people. For the national day of thanksgiving. For the dangers of abundance. For responsible citizens. For ecology and conservation. Very Lutheran, very white with a touch of liberal guilt. Help us, Lord, to be the people we should be.

The new hymnal kept those but added more. Now, on page 76 and page 77, we have prayers for national distress. For times of conflict, crisis, and disaster. Expanded prayers for peace. And on pages 62 and 63, an entire set of propers for a "Day of Mourning." Propers means a full set of scriptures and prayers designed for a complete worship service. Because on September 16, the Sunday after 9/11, we didn't have anything like this. Congregations and preachers had to wing it because the green book never envisioned an attack on civilians on the mainland of the United States of America. They did not envision that people would come together— and church attendance skyrocketed for a while after 9/11— people would come together, as is natural and healthy, needing ways to pray and reflect and worship and respond.

In troubling times— be it 9/11 or the Covid pandemic— people turn to religion seeking answers. And religious leaders and religious institutions are often happy and quick to provide answers. Certainly politicians and governments are often happy and quick to provide answers as well. But if the problem is trauma, theological answers will not bring healing. Military answers will not bring healing. CNN will not bring healing. Our church seems to realize that people need time and space. They need understanding. They need, most of all, community and connection.

What I want when I get off of that plane and walk into the terminal is to be met and smiled upon and hugged. Perhaps the work of the church in the face of something like 9/11 is not to provide answers. Not to assign blame. Not to pretend all is well. Perhaps the work of the church is to accompany people in their comings and goings, in their arrivals and departures. So that a trip to the airport does not trigger trauma. But instead a trip to the airport is what it should be. A journey. An adventure. A risk. A promise. A destination. A reunion. Amen.