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This was one of those events, like Pearl Harbor, which will remain in our minds so that we will always remember where we were and what we were doing when we heard the news. Where were you last Tuesday morning? Terry and I were in Albuquerque, having breakfast with my longtime friends, Bill and Nadine. They were planning to go to Rome and Paris, leaving on Wednesday. The phone rang, and it was Bill's sister, crying about something terrible which had happened. Bill finished talking with her and turned on the television, and we saw for the first time the ghastly sight of an airplane flying right into the World Trade Center, and then another one into the other tower. Within a few minutes there was another plane going right into the Pentagon. And we knew, quickly or slowly, that we had entered into a new reality for the United States.

Quickly or slowly well describes the different ways in which people react to such an event. Some people are immediately and totally caught up in the incredible drama, as rescue operations begin and volunteers come forward and we begin to hear the estimates of fatalities. They are glued to the television and find it hard to tear themselves away to do what they need to do to carry on their lives. We are long used to hearing of grim human disasters in our world, and most of them seem far away, happening to people we can feel sympathy for but do not feel closely connected to. This was different. As the names began to appear at the bottom of the television screen or in the newspaper, we read them with fear. I was relieved to find no familiar names, but the places disturbed me: they were familiar, where I had lived or close to where I had lived. The other connection was how they got into this: they had got on an airplane to fly from Boston to Los Angeles, just as I had done a number of times. How many times in recent years had I quite casually got onto an airplane and buckled up my seat belt to go somewhere from Logan Airport, just as these people had. How many times had I flown in along the Potomac River past the Pentagon to land at National Airport! Hey, this is close to home! And how many New Yorkers could feel the same way about going to a very tall building and catching the elevator to a very high floor to work at a desk? After that we found ourselves connecting to the families at home waiting for a phone call, and the brave rescue workers and firemen and police walking up the stairways to help more people come down. Many of them did not come back down.

The emotions were intense and very mixed: sadness and grief; anger and rage; helplessness and fear; confusion and disbelief. There were also feelings of awe at the courage of the rescue workers and the self-possession of Mayor Giuliani and Governor Pataki. And as the emotions are experienced in different ways by different people, so their duration and the ways of dealing with them will be varied. Those whose personal lives were affected by the loss of loved ones or terrible injuries will never be the same again. Others will carry emotional burdens from these days for a long time. It may help to realize that the ability to identify with, to feel, another's pain is part of what makes us human. It also may help to know that writers like Robert Terry Weston and Howard Thurman have helped us to express ourselves at times like these.

Weston wrote:

This is the truth that passes understanding;
This is the joy to all forever free:
Life springs from death and shatters every fetter
And winter turns to spring eternally.

Howard Thurman wrote:

I share with you the agony of your grief;
The anguish of your heart echoes in my own.
I know I cannot enter all you feel
Nor bear with you the burden of your pain
I can but offer what my love does give:
The strength of caring,
The warmth of one who seeks to understand
The silent storm-swept barrenness of such a loss.
This I do in quiet ways,
That on your lonely path
You may not walk alone.

We deal with our grief and our rage as we are helped and as we find ways to express them. And mixed through that whole process is a need to understand. How can people hate us enough to spend years of careful preparation to hi-jack a plane and fly it into a building to kill some of us and themselves? How can they feel that in doing this they are carrying out the will of God? What kind of God is that? `And why do they hate us so much? And who are they? To some extent, these are theological questions, and those of us who thought we could leave theology behind, with primitive ideas and ancient superstitions, might face the fact that we need to pay attention. Through all human history, people have struggled to understand the world and what was happening to them. The language they used was often centered on some notion of God, and theology was the study that described God. What we need to grasp is that in all centuries of writing about God, worshiping God, praying to God, and pondering about God, they were describing reality as they experienced it. They were trying to make sense of the unfathomable riddles of life and death, and perhaps most of the people of the world are still doing that in some theological drama. It involves creation: why is there something and not nothing? It involves what happens when we die: *nirvana* or resurrection or nothingness? It involves power and struggle: what do we do with our power? Do we strike back? It involves good and evil. Is evil somewhere out there or is it here, within us and among us?

I bring up the subject of reality because it seems evident to me that all America is confronted with a new reality since last Tuesday. One part of the new reality is that the feeling of being invulnerable is gone. Ronald Steel points out that "our invulnerability lasted for more than 200 years. During that time we grew rich and powerful, protected by our two oceans and our great territorial expanse. We fought our wars abroad, subjecting our enemies—Germany, Japan, North Korea and North Vietnam—to devastation. But we were safely beyond the reach of retaliation. Our wars brought us pain, but our home front was virtually unscathed." A week ago some of our leaders were telling us that we could have a defensive shield that would protect us from any hostile force in the world. And look what slipped in under the door. Former President George

Bush said the other day that the belief held by some that we could go it alone, since we are clearly the greatest power in the world, is out the window. The first steps of our government to track down the source of this attack involved consulting with other governments all over the world and asking them to join with us in an alliance against terrorism. We need their help, and so we are telling them that they are either with us or against us, and it will not go well with them to be against us or to harbor our enemies.

Another mark of the new reality is that this attack is not being characterized as merely terrorism, but it is war. Nobody could question that the severity of these acts, the tremendous loss of civilian life, and the surprise mode of the operation, would qualify it for the term war. But I wonder what hidden meanings and assumptions there are in the word war when we do not know precisely who is behind it, and when, so far, we are not presuming that any nation was specifically behind the attack. What would it mean to declare war on Osama bin Laden?

That brings up the question of retaliation. I presume always that any government's first duty is to protect its people and that any government which does not do so will not long be in power. I also agree with my favorite columnist, Thomas Friedman, who writes in the New York Times, that, "to not retaliate ferociously for this attack on our people is only to invite a worse attack tomorrow and an endless war with terrorists." Friedman goes on to make the point that we must carefully distinguish between those who worship a God of hate and those who worship the same God most Americans do. We are not retaliating against the Muslim religion or the great majority of those who resist the perversion of their religion by people like Osama bin Laden. Can we, as people of faith, justify the use of our tremendous power against those who inspired, plotted, and carried out this attack? It seems to me that the right of self-defense is well established both in our legal and ethical systems. That does not mean that we should drop a nuclear bomb on Afghanistan next week. Part of the justification of the use of military power is that it is directed against our real enemies and it is appropriately limited in scope.

The major struggle going on in the world today is a religious one, but it is not limited to any one faith or between any two faiths. It is the battle of fundamentalism against more open, evolving forms of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. The modern world has changed with breathtaking speed in the last century, and our country represents all that change to millions who both envy us and hate us. As Ronald Steel points out: "we champion a 'new world order' of capitalism, individualism, secularism, and democracy that should be the norm everywhere. We orchestrate a global economic system that dictates what others shall produce, what they shall be paid, and whether or not they will find work. We proudly declare that we are the world's undisputed Number One. Then we are surprised that others might hold us responsible for all that they find threatening in the modern world."

At first it sounds too glib to say that "they hate us because we believe in democracy, and individual freedom, and human rights," but I think it is basically true. All of these ideas are threatening to those who yearn for a simpler time, when leaders were followed and people knew what was expected of them. But there is another reason why we are hated, and that is because sometimes we appear to believe in democracy and freedom and human rights for us but not necessarily for them.

This week introduced a new reality for all Americans, but especially for our leaders. I think that Mayor Giuliani, Governor Pataki, and President Bush acquitted themselves well in what they said and did. Our national leaders will need both great wisdom and the support of an informed, thoughtful public to take us over the next steps of this new path. They deserve our support in doing what they have to do against those who worship a God of hate. We deserve their open and honest declaration of where they are leading us.