



# St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21057

## A MEDITATION ON 9/11 – TEN YEARS LATER *The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity, September 11th, 2011*

### ✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

The Tenth Anniversary of the Attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon has turned into a highly charged affair, politically speaking. The U.S. government has issued guidelines to official speakers at memorial gatherings to play down – or avoid mentioning altogether – *al Qaida*, the Muslim terrorist organization that perpetrated the attack. This is like discussing events at Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, while omitting all mention of the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Similarly, Mayor Bloomberg of New York has vetoed the participation of clergy of all faiths in the official Tenth Anniversary memorial event at Ground Zero, the site of the former World Trade Center in Manhattan. This is no less bizarre a notion than deliberately failing to name of the terrorist organization behind the slaughter.

The attack was, of course, entirely religiously motivated. It was carried out by men for whom butchering people who do not share their religious beliefs is both a salvific act and a sacred duty. Moreover, the massacre took place in a city in which is arguably the world's largest concentration of members of the religious faiths the terrorists hate most: namely Christians and Jews. To be sure, members of other faiths were killed in the attack, including Muslims, but, in the view of the attackers, these poor unfortunates were mere "collateral damage."

Trying to make sense of what happened (the declared purpose of such memorial meetings) without involving clergy – Christian, Jewish and,

yes, Muslim – dooms the efforts to failure. After all, what theology wrought, only theology can heal. And this demands we to confront the religious motive behind the attacks (indeed, the sole motive behind the attacks) honestly, squarely, and without equivocation.

There is no disguising the fact that the spiritual wounds sustained on 9/11 are still raw, open and bleeding. This is largely because the business of making sense of what has happened to us has been confined to the political arena. In America, we are informed, the separation of church and state is an overriding constitutional principle. Religion has no place in the public square, and especially when it comes to dealing with such a divisive issue as the attack by Muslim terrorists on the twin symbols of American might – the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Well, the politicians have had a decade in which to work their magic. But the political controversies surrounding not just today's memorial events, but the whole sorry saga of creating memorials to the victims, graphically illustrate the depth of their failure – a failure that should not be at all surprising.

A time hallowed political strategy for dealing with inconvenient truths is to sweep them under the table. This what has happened with the events of 9/11. Not least, we are repeatedly told "Islam is a religion of peace." This is simply not true – and even half educated Americans are mostly well aware of the fact.

Islam was conceived and nurtured in slaughter. For most of Islam's existence, its primary instrument of conversion has been the sword. Conquest of Mecca in 630 AD was followed by four and a half centuries of jihad during which the Christian communities of North Africa and the Fertile Crescent were wiped out and Islamic rule extended by conquest to Sicily, much of Italy and the Iberian Peninsula.

The Crusades (from which Muslims derive the epithet for Christians: "Crusaders") are certainly among the most shameful episodes in the history of the West. But vicious and blood drenched though they were, they were a belated response to more than 450 years of Muslim aggression. As Christians, we cannot condone the evils committed the name of our faith. But while we need to repent the violence, we must not be blind to the long history of Islamic slaughter, conquest and enslavement that prompted wicked men to repay evil with evil in the name of Christ.

That said, it is doubtless true that most Muslims are peace loving, and would like nothing better than to live in harmony with their neighbors of other faiths. Yet a glance at the television and the newspapers attests daily to the unhappy fact that large numbers of Muslims who live in the European Community are open in their contempt for their nominally Christian hosts and refuse to assimilate into the societies in which they live.

This is not a problem that can be solved by pretending it doesn't exist – the method apparently favored by most Western politicians. Nor from a Christian point of view ought it to be solved by expelling Muslims who refuse to assimilate. Such a policy would be unChristian. Jesus, after all, commanded us to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us. It would also probably be entirely counterproductive breeding further mistrust, hatred and, no doubt, terrorism.

To reach a solution, we must first identify the cause of the problem. People in the political arena attribute the Muslim hatred of things Western to the general poverty of the Islamic world. This is unpersuasive. Certainly, the Islamic world has for centuries lagged economically far behind the West, but the hijackers who crashed the aircraft into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon were far from poor. They were among the most privileged

members of Muslim society. So, too, were the men who masterminded the attack, not to mention those who financed it.

In fact, all the evidence indicates that the cause of the hatred lies in the teachings of the religion, itself. To be sure, there is a strain of Islam that is, indeed, peaceful and whose adherents wish to live in harmony with their non-Islamic neighbors. But this is a relatively recent development – one that emerged in the wake of the defeat of the Ottoman Army by the Austrians and Poles at the Battle of Vienna in 1683.

The Ottoman defeat enabled Islamic scholars to explore Christian thought more openly and in greater depth. Consequently, Christian humanistic ideas began to influence Islamic thinking. This was not received with unbridled enthusiasm by all Muslims. The 18<sup>th</sup> Century theologian Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in what is now Saudi Arabia damned those who abandoned the old violent ways as heretics and urged purging of Islam of the innovations derived from Christian thought. Thanks to the Saudi foreign aid program that uses oil wealth to fund mosques, schools and social programs to preach their fundamentalist brand of Islam, Wahhabism has become an increasingly potent force in the Muslim world.

But what Christianity wrought in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries – the years during which the bulk of Islam's most inspired spiritual works were written – it can repeat today. We can help the Muslim communities in America that uphold humanistic Islam to confront those who promote the Wahhabist credo of violence. Indeed, we have no alternative but to do so – for to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim world, we must first win over the hearts and minds of the Muslims in our midst.

But for this to work, our political leaders must drop their policies of pretence and denial. Like it or not, faith must confront faith, and in this process there is no room for politics – just straight talking. While, as Christians, Jesus commanded us to forgive those who sin against us, we must make it plain that for forgiveness to be effective it must be sincerely accepted and acted upon. Our faith, moreover, does not require us to show an infinite tolerance for evil behavior. Indeed, it requires us to lay down our very lives to protect and defend the innocent. *AMEN.*