

Scripture & Sermon Starter

For the occasion of the fifth-anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks
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Isaiah 35:4-7a; Psalm 146; James 2:1-17; Saint Mark 7:24-37

Serving the Word

It's been five years. And it's been a lifetime. Five years since that spectacularly clear and crisp morning — bright with so much promise, shining with so much light — was stricken, pierced and murdered before our very eyes. Who could believe what we saw and heard?

Five years. Here in New York, it seems like only yesterday. And it feels like a lifetime has passed. I'm sure that in Washington and on that Pennsylvania hillside, in Kabul, Fallujah and Baghdad, and in the hundreds of towns — small, medium and large — where sons and daughters have died in combat since that day, the same is also — and will always be — true. Five years ago tomorrow; only yesterday, but a lifetime ago.

Oh, how we've longed with the exiles, for God's vengeance, God's "terrible recompense" for the losses we've experienced since that day! Oh, how we've sung with the psalmist, to "trust not in rulers, nor any child of earth for there is no help in them." Oh, how we've echoed those *initial* words of Jesus, when confronted by one of *them* with *their* needs: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." We surely don't want to admit it but, in these last five years, we've longed, sung and echoed those thoughts more than once.

It would be well if we'd make a good confession today and admit all we've thought, said or done — even guiltily, even fleetingly — in the wake of 9/11. It would be well if we would use this day before that day to let God's Word confront us at our weakest, and to admit the real answer to James' question, "have you not made distinctions...and become judges with evil thoughts?" Integrity demands we all respond in the affirmative.

And wait and watch for God.

Oh, you who are fearful of heart, here is your God! Striding among us today in the person of Jesus, in the waters of baptism, in the bread and wine of the Eucharist! Coming among us to astound us when we're at our lowest, by raising us to a new and faith-filled life! Opening blind eyes; unstopping deaf ears so that the lame ones frolic like fawns and the speechless sing for joy; and the timid and fearful are bold and courageous.

And because Jesus strides into our midst and enters our house — it's actually his own — and does “not escape our notice,” we are enabled to follow the advice of Saint James so that, in this most difficult and still fear-filled of times, we can “love our neighbor (we know who they are) as we love ourselves.”

The world is in desperate need of that love. Especially five years — and a lifetime — later. For there are prisoners to be freed; hungry to be fed. There are strangers to care for and oppressed who need justice.

And there is us, touched, taught and nourished by Jesus, being sent on this day to support them. Here is your God, O God's people! The psalmist must have it correct Hallelujah!