

## A TIME FOR SILENCE<sup>i</sup>

On the day the towers fell, there was no Twitter, no YouTube nor Facebook, no iPhones nor iPads nor Droids.

Texting via a cellphone was new and most people hadn't even tried it yet.

Today, photos and videos and news of such a terrorist attack would be updated second by second via the internet. But on that day in 2001, the news came in bits and pieces as we all struggled to understand what was happening and how to make sense of it.

We have been blessed by many good prayers written for the occasion of this anniversary remembrance. A retired UM Bishop living in Charleston, with key connections to UC – Bishop William Boyd Grove, wrote:

**Holy One, loving and gracious God, as we remember the horror of the terrorist attack on our nation ten years ago, we turn to you. We bring to you our sadness and sense of loss, our anger and our longing for a world more peaceful and more just.**

**We pray for comfort for those who lost loved ones on that terrible day; families of office workers, and firefighters and police officers who gave their lives for others. Take from the hearts of those who loved them all bitterness, and touch them with a quiet blessing of comfort and of grace.**

**As Jesus commanded, we pray for our enemies; for those who hate us and seek to destroy our country. Wean them from hate and violence, and move their hearts to repentance and to a new understanding of the best qualities of America. And help us as citizens of this country to be faithful to the best of our**

country's traditions and values, so that we may be ever more worthy of the respect of people of other lands.

We pray for those who profess the faith of Islam, many of whom were themselves victims on that September day ten years ago, and in the intervening years. Increase our commitment to be in relationship with them that is built on dialogue, trust and mutual respect.

Hear our prayers, most Holy God, which we offer in the name of Christ the Lord. AMEN.<sup>ii</sup>

For weeks now, news programs, radio commentators, and blogs have encouraged people to share their memories about 9/11. Some of this public discussion has been very moving, some trite, and no small amount has been very divisive.

But all of it has reminded me of one thing: words often fail to express what is beyond emotional comprehension. As poet Adrienne Rich writes, “**Tonight I think/no poetry/will serve.**”

**More than anything, on this anniversary, I wish to be silent.**

A few may protest saying that it is important to not forget the events of a decade ago. That is true. A people must know their history, or be doomed to repeat it. **But who alive then and today has forgotten?**

Everyone of thinking age knows where they were on that day ten years ago today, when the first planes crashed.

Indeed, the media will not let us forget. The images of 9/11 are seared in our minds forever, replayed hundreds of times on television and across the Internet.

There is, however, a difference between memory—the snapshots that stay in our minds always—and RE-membering.

RE-membering means to “put back together” the pieces of the past, to arrange the pictures of memory in order to

- ⌘ make meaning,
- ⌘ to heal,
- ⌘ to forgive, or
- ⌘ to inspire.

Memory and RE-membering are related, but they are not the same thing.

- ⌘ Memory is simply not forgetting..
- ⌘ RE-membering is HOW we put the pieces together and WHAT that process does for us – individually, as a community, as a nation, and as a world community.

In the decade since 9/11, we have not forgotten.

**But we have treated the events of 9/11 rather like taking a video of a loved one’s death—and replaying the ending over and over and over.**

**Anyone who has suffered the pain of death knows that endlessly playing a DVD of the last moments of that person’s life will never lead to healing.**

Indeed, watching death do its worst repeatedly “opens wounds and grief anew, imprinting the immediacy of suffering on the minds of the mournful.”

In order to heal, to “move on,” as counselors say, one must do the hard work of death—to patiently remember the WHOLE life of those who have died and to learn from the gifts each one left behind.

RE-membering is a process -- a spiritual one at that -- by which we come to terms with mortality and flawed humanity, as well as the power of courage and abiding love.

We all have a memory of 9/11. But HOW have we RE-membered?

Silence makes room for RE-membering.

I don't NEED, and I don't WANT to hear patriotic songs, jingoistic speeches, or even well-considered rehearsals of “what happened on that day.”

I want to see no pictures of BURNING TOWERS or flags waving.

I wish for empty public space, where there is a communal practice of SILENCE, to reflect on not only what happened on 9/11 but ALSO in the long, sad decade since. I NEED some quiet space SHARED IN COMMUNITY to reflect upon what we have become, in that decade, and how we can never again return to the way it was.

For just a brief time, I long for, in the words of an ancient hymn, “let all mortal flesh keep silence,” in the face of the fear and trembling that gripped us one September day ten years ago.

For just a short time, in silence, I want to RE-member the individual lives that were lost on that day, and try to RE-member meaning to those lives, in the big God-Picture.

I wonder what we could find there—about our selves, our neighbors, and God—in that void of words?

Would you join me in that time of community silence – now.

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<sup>1</sup> With thanks for the Silence Treatment of this Anniversary to Diane Butler Bass' blog posting.

<sup>ii</sup> Willam Boyd Grove, Bishop [retired] The United Methodist Church, Co-chairperson, Peace with Justice Task Force, West Virginia Council of Churches