

Danville News Column
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“A Curious Decade”
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What has happened since the horrific attacks of September 11, 2001?

Our nation has waged its longest wars, with nearly 6,100 US soldiers killed, the number of wounded exceeding 40,000. Better delivery of medicine has saved more lives, but increased the percentage of disabled soldiers. High soldier suicide rates. 2.7 trillion dollars have been spent for these wars, excluding payoffs to nations, contractors, and tribes. Global recession too. We have seen the persecution and flight of Iraqi Christians. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed. Massive refugee resettlements. Strident voices voicing the politics of fear. The Patriot Act was enacted. The Department of Homeland Security was established, security measures implemented. We commenced a global war on terror and adjusted to asymmetrical warfare. We have endured numerous terrorism incidents caused by a variety of extremists, with an unknown number of terroristic attacks thwarted. Prisoners were tortured. Osama Bin Laden was killed. Saddam Hussein was executed. Elections were held in Iraq and Afghanistan, proud blue fingers. Oil prices have tripled. We have accepted as normal long lines at Airport Security, surveillance cameras at public schools, and prohibitions on carrying pocketknives. Then: increased attention to immigration restrictions. Our greater familiarity with Islam has been matched by increased misconceptions about Islam. Plus, we note a realization of global inter-dependency.

What else has happened? Please add your own thoughts.

I'm Calvinistic enough not to be naïve about the reality of human sin. I respect the need for a quality military. We may love others (as we think love is), but not all reciprocate in kind, do they? Innocents must be protected, even if by defensive force, for innocents should never be targets, whether by hijacked airplanes or car bombs, neither by landmines nor drones.

Out of cancerous ashes I claim hope, despite this decade of failure and self-punishment. We speak of the failure of revenge and self-interest, hatred and pride, even as we have learnt how the cunning of sin ever seeks to pervert and distort what we think it is good. The terrorists didn't view themselves as doing evil but as doing a good, as right, as justified. Failed also is the just war theory, proving violence as hopelessly inadequate. We have failed to make anyone secure through politics, surveillance, economics, military might. We've been driven to our knees. Ten years late, here now is a wise place for us to begin.

Five days after September 11, 2001, I baptized an infant girl named Lydia. What follows is the last part of my sermon addressed to her.

“Therefore, we will be there for you when you must inevitably enter your times. We will show you, as you awaken and learn of the world, how loss and fall and calamity and prides and injustice shall not steal nor despoil your soul, but shall instead drive you closer, deeper toward your faith. We will (this we promise today) show you how cruel violence demands from us the courage of love and devotion, an honest indignation and sober resolve inspired by compassion and measured by forgiveness. We will (this we promise today) show you how despite the rage we feel rising and the temptation toward our own judgments, our own frightening righteous ideologies and extremisms, our own rash hatreds, God's life in us shall subdue such passions, steer us from the mob, and, with the pain of repentance, give us a right patriotism, the gift of reason, and the courage of noble convictions. We will (this we promise today) show you how evil may not be our only choice as we come to our crossroads of free will. We, and our wills, shall be drawn toward the right way, beckoned down another path, a finer path, by the one who precedes. With these our promises surrounding you, today you are baptized for us all. Child of mine, dearest Lydia, among all our promises, we also wish we could promise you a safe world. But we cannot. We never could. Such is the price of birth. Such also is birth's gift. It is in the lack of safety our God is known more clearly. For today you are baptized. Bright promise in the midst of terror and sorrow and fear. You, child, are our shining declaration of hope. My child. Our child. You, while the world may twist and writhe, are our incandescent declaration today that our future and our times, and yours, shall pursue where salvation beckons.”

A decade later, we still have promises to keep.