

SERMON BY PASTOR CAROL
CUSTEAD

HON. BILL SHUSTER

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 25, 2001

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring this great chamber's attention to a sermon I recently heard at Zion Lutheran Church in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. I fully believe that there is a message in the sermon for all of us to learn. There are many people across the United States of American who are continuing to deal with the effects of the recent deadly terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. I believe this sermon may help those people deal with this tragedy.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

(By Pastor Carol Custead)

The scene is etched in our minds. It entered over our television screens in the safety and comfort of our homes, schools, and places of work; and it left us feeling vulnerable and shaken. The scene seemed surreal: a beautiful blue September sky over Manhattan, those magnificent human-made towers of the World Trade Center gleaming in the sunshine, with a jet airliner in the background—and then, suddenly we realized that that airplane was headed right for the towers at full speed. It struck with explosive force which ultimately toppled the tower with its thousands of innocent people in a cloud of dust on the floor of lower Manhattan. At first it looked like Hollywood's special effects at work on our screens. But soon the reality of this horrific scene sunk deeply into the American collective consciousness—indeed into the world's: America was under attack!

Those headlines Tuesday morning were so unbelievable. For those who lived through Pearl Harbor the headlines, and the feelings that accompanied them, brought back memories of December 7, 1941. For those younger who have never experienced an attack on our great and powerful nation, it left us feeling helpless, frightened and confused like never before.

What do we make of these things? So much has been said and written these past few days in an attempt to answer that question. I add my preacher's words in these short minutes to suggest a few spiritual things to keep in mind in the aftermath, and as we bravely face an uncertain future together.

First, God is still good. These terrible acts of terrorism are in no way a part of God's plan. They are not God's will. What we have seen in the acts is that radical evil exists. Let me quote a basic definition of evil, which I have found to be helpful. "Evil is anything that twists, blurs or destroys the goodness of God in His creation". I repeat: Evil is anything that twists, blurs or destroys the goodness of God in His creation. God is good, and God's good will is ultimately accomplished, but that does not mean that everything that happens in this world is God's will. Evil runs its course in opposition to God's will.

We can illustrate this in this way. Picture a stream running its course down the mountain and into the ocean. Someone could try to stop that stream from coming down the mountain. They might take some large rocks and build a dam across the course of the stream. But we know what would happen. The water would simply be diverted and find another way down the mountain. It will get to the ocean one way or another. So it is with God's will. We human beings can ob-

struct God's plan, intentionally or unknowingly, but it will ultimately reach its goal.

We saw the face of evil on Tuesday. There are evil people in this world. The hijackers were trained to be killer pilots and indoctrinated with fanaticism—with an extremely twisted understanding of God's will which made them embrace mass murder and suicide, believing it to be a part of God's plan. Make no mistake: this is not what traditional Islam teaches. The Islamic or Muslim faith does not condone violence or suicide. These Islamic extremists are very sick people who have twisted their religion—we should keep in mind that the strong majority of Muslims are good people who seek to do God's will within a moral code shared by Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike.

Yes, we have seen radical evil at work this week, but goodness exists even more strongly. God is still good, and the goodness of God will ultimately prevail.

Second, God is still in control. Part of what is so frightening in all this is that sense of helplessness, that sense that we have lost control. While evil seems to have struck a huge blow we need to keep in mind that God is at work healing and restoring goodness and order to our world. This can be seen through the many actions of good people following the attacks. Even though the scenes of horror have been etched into our minds, so have the countless scenes of heroism, bravery, mercy, kindness, compassion and goodness as the American people and people across the world have come to the aid of those directly affected. We must keep these scenes before us and remember them. We must dwell on the goodness and not on the evil so that evil will not win the day. Look at all the good things that God is still working even in the midst of this enormous tragedy. The world community is coming together in a common bond against the evil. The people of this huge nation are coming together like a close knit family to face the task of grieving and healing and getting on with our lives, knowing that if we stop living because this happened then we give the terrorists what they wanted. The words of encouragement from the people of Oklahoma City to the people of New York and Washington D.C. were well stated: "Have hope. Life and goodness will return." Yes, God is still in control.

Third, God is still our God. God is not some remote force out there that leaves us on our own in this desperate and broken world. He calls and gathers us into communities of faith where we can seek mutual comfort, assurance, and guidance. This week more than ever we can see why religion is not a private matter. We need these communities of faith. We need each other especially at times like this and God has not left us alone. We have the good resources of our faith—the faith that has been passed down by countless generations that have faced adversity. As the palmist has written long ago, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble . . . The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our stronghold." (Psalm 46)

Finally, let me shift gears to answer a question that has been asked of both Pastor Scott and me this week. "Would it be the Christian response to retaliate?" While pacifistic Christians may answer "no"; our answer is deeply steeped in the theology of Martin Luther—and St. Augustine and others before him. It is the God-given vocation of good government to maintain order, peace, and safety so that civilization can function. Civilized society is based upon the free movement and gathering of people for work, for school, and for the basic production and exchange of goods and services. Terrorism undermines the basic function of civilization—the free and safe movement and

gathering of people for these purposes. The nations of this world do need to hold accountable and responsible those governments that allow these terrorists to function.

A look back in history makes this clear. When the Roman Empire fell, and when the Empire was no longer able to provide for the safe movement and gathering of people; the economy, education, and culture collapsed. Then, what we now call the "Dark Ages" began—that period when Barbarians ruled the forests and no one was safe to leave their homes.

Another example: What if some one was wandering the streets of this town and randomly shooting and killing innocent people? Would we not need the police to act to put an end to that so that we could safely leave our homes and go about our business again?

The situation we face in our world today is much the same only on a much larger scale. More than ever, today we exist in a global community or a global society. This means that all governments must participate in fulfilling the basic function of government—that is to maintain the peace and order needed for civilization to function for the common good of all people. That is their God-given calling.

The nations of this world will need to come together to take action as best we can against this new illusive enemy of terrorism that has attacked not only America but all of the civilized world. We must act not for the sake of vengeance or retribution, but for the sake of restoring safety, order and peace to our world. The very core of civilization has been threatened this week. The Christian response is not one of vengeance and retribution but one that will best restore order to our world—and that may only be possible in this broken world through military action. It is time for us to band together to pray earnestly for clarity in this matter by our nation's leaders, by all responsible and civilized national leaders of this world, and by the military. God help us! Amen.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2002

SPEECH OF

HON. LORETTA SANCHEZ

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 20, 2001

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2586) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2002 for military activities of the Department of Defense, to prescribe military personnel strengths for fiscal year 2002, and for other purposes:

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Chairman, on September 20, 2001, during debate on the Defense Authorization bill for fiscal year 2002, H.R. 2586, I entered into a colloquy with Representative SKELTON regarding the Marine Corps Air Station Tustin. I have attached related correspondence between myself and the Department of the Navy which was inadvertently left out of the RECORD.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

Washington, DC, July 19, 2001.

Hon. DUNCAN HOLADAY,

Deputy Assistant Secretary, Installations and Facilities, Department of the Navy, Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY HOLADAY: When you met with me and representatives of the Santa Ana Unified School District in my office on