

A Paradigm of Insecurity: Living in a Post-9/11 World
(Matthew 6:25-34)

Although I had no way of knowing, it would be my last visit. I don't recall the exact date, but it was an unusually clear day in May of 1999. Looking down at the Statue of Liberty from the 94th floor of Tower Two of the World Trade Center – a quarter of a mile high – she seemed small and insignificant, if not proud, holding her teeny torch.

We ate lunch in a conference room looking out on the New York harbor. The view was awesome. I remember hearing the stories of several people who had been working in Tower Two a few years earlier when a terrorist bomb was detonated in the parking garage. The stories reflected mostly inconvenience and some confusion, but never fear.

As engineers heavily invested in the laws of the natural world, we unanimously agreed the twin towers were invincible works of steel and art. Although made by the hands of men and women, the towers could never be destroyed by human hands. We even laughed at the folly of any terrorist plot to take down these gleaming testimonies to capitalism.

Imagine my horror two years later as I watched those same testimonies implode onto the streets of Manhattan. I will never forget the words I spoke just before the first tower came down. "There is no way those buildings will fail." I knew that both structures had been designed to sustain a direct hit by a Boeing 707.

In the minutes, hours, and even days that followed the terrorist attacks of

September 11, 2001, I understood for the first time what it means to be in a state of denial. I could not accept what had happened. I was morbidly drawn to the video images of those towers melting into a cloud of toxic fumes. I needed to see those images over and over again to believe it had really happened and that 2,748 people died in fear and terror.

And I will also never forget what I said when the second tower collapsed. "The world – as we know it – will never be the same." Please pray with me.

God of grace, you have created all things for their time in your time – in *kairos*. Help us to remember that it is you and you alone we look to in times of uncertainty. Open our hearts and minds to the scripture read and your word proclaimed. Make my words your words this morning as we come face to face with the insecurity of the world we have crafted by our own hands – not yours. Through Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

Next Friday we will observe the eighth anniversary of the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, as well as the hijacking and destruction of United Airlines Flight 93. Our security as a free nation was severely compromised. And it continues to be undermined by the threat of future attacks on US soil and real attacks on other nations. "Al Qada

may be down, but they are not out” in the words of David Chertoff, former director of the Homeland Security Department.

Eight years later we have cause to wonder just how safe we really are in the post-9/11 world. And who are we to trust for our security today and in the future? Terrorism seeks to rule our lives by fear. So we are compelled to worry today about what might happen tomorrow. Likewise, we are compelled to take action today to prevent what might happen tomorrow.

On each anniversary we remember the lives that were lost, particularly the heroic first responders. We also revive the debate around the question of security – of living in the post-9/11 world. From immigration to civil rights to the war in Iraq, the debate has heated up. Our leaders continue to assure an uncertain nation that we are safer today than we were eight years ago. Nothing in the debate, however, has considered the biblical mandate.

Did you hear that mandate in the gospel reading this morning? Jesus is telling us to ³⁴“Give [our] entire attention to what God is doing *right now*, and [not to] get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help [us] deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.” That quote comes from *The Message: The Bible in Plain English*.

We are always called to interpret the biblical text and discern its meaning for our lives *today*. How does this text speak to us today? Can you believe Jesus would issue such a paradoxical command today in the shadow of 21st century terrorism here and around the world? Whether we are comfortable with this text or not, we need to consider

its meaning for us today on the eve of yet another September 11th.

I described the text from Matthew as a paradox. It is paradoxical because it is contradictory to our understanding of security. This biblical mandate goes to the heart of our desire to be safe and secure from the threat of repeat attacks. Jesus’ command is paradoxical because we rely today on institutions to protect us from the threats of tomorrow – institutions with names like Homeland Security, the Transportation Security Administration, and the National Security Agency.

The biblical mandate is paradoxical because the material world we have created has deceived us into thinking we have something to protect. In reality, all that we have is a gift from God but it’s mostly “stuff.” In the end it will return to God, so what is it we are really trying to protect. God would rather see us give up some of our “stuff” than die protecting it.

The biblical mandate is paradoxical because it calls into question the means we use to make our lives secure. All too often security measures translate to violence – physical and emotional. The security afforded by institutions and human beings is limited at best. At its worst, that security comes at the expense of others through methods like racial profiling and retribution.

Jesus’ command to not worry about tomorrow is actually an invitation to insecurity. The world has always been a dangerous place. From the time our prehistoric ancestor hunter-gatherers lived among saber-toothed tigers to Old Testament wars through medieval times to the World Wars to modern day terrorism, the world has always been a dangerous place.

The problem we face as 21st century Americans is that the dangerous world is just now coming to our homeland. For over two hundred years we have lived a privileged existence – a secure life unparalleled in most of the rest of the world in places like Israel, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Indonesia, most of the African continent just to name a few.

Frederick Buechner, a contemporary theologian, once said, “Compassion is the sometimes fatal capacity for feeling what it’s like to live inside somebody else’s skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too.”

Jesus’ mandate to “... give our entire attention to what God is doing *right now*, and not get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow ...” is an invitation to “live in somebody else’s skin.” It’s a wake up call to understand that we cannot be secure in our homeland until the rest of the world is secure in theirs.

Things will not be better for us until things are better for the rest of the world – the other 90%. Rather than dedicating so many resources in the effort to guarantee our security, perhaps we should spread those resources around for the purpose of improving the security of others in the world.

There is a new paradigm or model for security. That paradigm is to follow Jesus’ mandate to live for today and not worry about tomorrow. The paradoxical faith Jesus teaches is that in order to save your life you must lose your life. That’s risky business. The paradoxical faith Jesus teaches is that our security is in that which endures, not that which is forever fleeting.

In the spiritual journal *Weavings*,

Robert C. Morris writes, “The only way to a security that circumstances cannot take away is to trust in things that endure, no matter what. Rather than falling back into fear in a world of only partially trustworthy people and institutions, we are called to a radical trust in the God who calls us together in the grand risks of love: justice, healing and the repair of the world. Such risks may not make us always safe, but they will make our humanity grow in grace and strength.”¹

The moral message here is to trust in God for our security – the God who endures in difficult and stressful times. If we are to love others in the way Jesus intends for us to love, we must sacrifice some of our security. We must sacrifice some of our security for peace. We must dare to risk by reaching out to others in love without fearing for our own safety. To do otherwise is to never risk anything for the sake of the Gospel. To do otherwise would be a disservice to the 2,748 people that lost their lives on September 11, 2001.

On Friday, however you will remember those souls, consider the biblical text – Jesus’ mandate to “... give your entire attention to what God is doing *right now*, and not get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow.” As you remember those souls consider Jesus’ paradigm of insecurity – that our security lies in trusting God first, the only one that endures in difficult times.

And always remember Jesus’ invitation to live in somebody else’s skin and understand that we cannot be

¹ Robert C. Morris. *Trusting God in Fearful Times* (Weavings® by Upper Room Ministries®, © 2005; Nashville, TN); XX1-5, page 22

secure in our homeland until the rest of the world is secure in theirs. This is the new model of insecurity – a paradigm for living in a post-9/11 world.