

Column

It doesn't seem possible, but we are nearing the 20th anniversary of 9/11. This date -- like Dec. 7, 1941, and Nov. 22, 1963 -- is etched in our national consciousness. Everyone alive at the time and old enough to remember has a story to tell where he or she was on that fateful day.

In a flash the people of this nation were awakened to the fact of evil, and for a brief moment there was a spiritual return. People came back to life.

I was in the church office, and as soon as the news went out (or rather continued to unfold) the telephones began to ring. People wanted to know if the church was open for prayer and if there were any services that day. For over a week noonday services were held, spontaneously.

Almost 20 years later we find ourselves in a very different situation. Greg Laurie, in a recent article in Decision magazine, captures the gravity of the present hour when he writes: "I cannot remember a time when we have been more divided, desensitized, deluded and spiritually dead."

What will it take to turn things around? To bring about a new spiritual awakening in this country? It is hard to say, but sadly it may take something on the order of 9/11. Put another way, desperation is often what it takes to drive us to our knees and to refocus our attention on those things that are true, permanent and from God.

In the article I have just cited, Laurie says something similar: "When things are going well, and everything is roses, we tend to think and act like we don't really need God all that much, that we've got things under control. It's when things go south that we start to realize how desperate our spiritual position is."

Obviously, we don't seek out calamitous times. On the contrary, week by week in our services of public worship we commend this nation and its people to God's merciful care. From Scripture, we know that God is not the author of evil. His healing balm is always near at hand. Yet we know it must be applied, and this is where you and I enter the picture.

Satan is on the prowl, but we dare not throw in the towel. No, when tempted to do so, we have only to remind ourselves: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He reigns.

The God who raises the dead can bring about a national rebirth. But where must it begin? There can be but one answer -- with ourselves, with the Church, that is, the company of Christ's faithful people.

The late British evangelist John Stott correctly observed: "God must speak to us before we have any liberty to speak to Him." I would augment his statement to say: God must speak to us before we have any liberty to speak *for* Him to our culture.

With that thought in mind, let us go to His house this coming Sunday in the spirit of great expectation asking Him to do just that . . . to speak to us. And, when He does (as He is pledged to do when His people pray and seek His face), may our response be the words of the boy Samuel: "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth" (1 Samuel 3:10). When this happens, God is on the move and renewal is near at hand.

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may, by thy mighty aid, be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Third Sunday after Trinity, the Book of Common Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.