

## Column

Sept. 11, 2001, was a shot heard around the world just as surely as that one fired on April 19, 1775, which began the American Revolutionary War. It said, “Wake up, America. You are not invincible. There are those out there who want to bring you down.”

The good thing – if anything good could out of such a dastardly act—was that people came together. For the moment, “United we stand” became our national slogan, and the way we stood together was by leaning on one another.

About a week and a half after the attack, I flew to New York. As soon as I got into the terminal of the Atlanta Airport, it was obvious we were living in a new world. Not only were soldiers with machine guns highly visible, but also a new kindness from the agents who waited on you at the ticket counters. I was asked: “Do you need help finding your gate?” Unheard of in the pre-911 world!

And when I got to my gate and while waiting for the plane to board, I experienced what almost certainly would not have happened a few weeks earlier. A young black man traveling with several other men from his company, himself an Anglican Christian, noticed my clerical collar and said that he had been praying for someone like me to be on board with him. Would you believe we ended up as seatmates? But before boarding the plane, while still in the departure lounge, he offered me a half of the sandwich he was preparing to eat. A very touching act of kindness, to be sure.

The great tragedy of 911 was that the burst of solidarity and kindness that erupted immediately after the crisis did not last. Over time we returned to our old selfish and complacent ways. We ceased to be united and no longer stood together.

This sad state of division continues down to this very moment. Moreover, we find unscrupulous people actually promoting and fomenting division. These people attempt to get the citizens of our great republic shouting at each other from opposite corners and in some cases actually shooting at each other.

These domestic terrorists and their accomplices are far more lethal than those who planned and perpetrated the attacks of Sept. 11. They foster hate and distrust between the races, pit the sexes – men and women – against each other, seek to put a wedge between the police and those they protect and organize protests which in many cases are anything but peaceful.

These are public enemy No. 1 and must be stopped. The lesson of 911 must not be forgot: United we stand.

But what ultimately unites people? The answer I would want to give is Christ. In the early days of the Christian Church, a remarkable unity was achieved. People of various ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic standings, along with male and female, bond and free, began to gather around a common table and became one family.

More than that, these same ones began to care for each other in practical ways. For example, Paul at one point organized a collection for Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who were suffering deprivation. Those contributing were primarily Gentile believers in Greece and Asia Minor. Old walls separating the human family began to come down. The words of John Oxenham's hymn began to take shape and form: "In Christ there is no East or West, / In Him no South or North, / But one great fellowship of love / Thro'out the whole-wide earth."

The good work begun then needs to continue today. Where might we begin? What about sharing a sandwich with a stranger in an airport lounge?

*O GOD, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace; Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly, union and concord: that as there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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