

Resisting Evil

1 Peter 5:6-11

Communion Vigil for the Nation in Mourning

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It is hard to isolate a single emotion we are feeling tonight. Over the last two days we have been through so many. Some of us are feeling a profound sadness that has descended like a dark cloud deep into our souls. All we can think about is this sadness; all other topics and projects of work feel meaningless. Others of us are feeling fear, not just over the volatility of life, but over the nature of the world. Has the earth spun completely out of control? Still others of us would have to say that the primary emotion is anger. "How can this be? Who is responsible?" we want to know. If we have profound sadness in our souls, we have seething anger in our bones.

Added to all these emotions is a frustrating feeling of powerlessness. We want to do something, but don't know what. The day after Pearl Harbor was bombed there were long lines of young people waiting to join the military in support of a nation under attack. With this attack it is harder for citizens to know what to do. We will give blood, make contributions to relief agencies, stay informed. But we can't fix what has been broken, and we can never recover what was stolen from us yesterday.

The nation will never forget yesterday. It will recover, but it will never be the same. Among the many changes that happened to us is the loss of any naive assumptions we used to have about invulnerability. We now know that evil can crash into our lives on any day. It is a realization that the rest of the world has known for a long time. Now Americans know it as well. Over the last few days I have received many e-mails of support and sympathy from church leaders around the world, including Australia, Europe, Asia, and Africa. But the two notes that have overwhelmed me were from the bishops of Croatia and Jerusalem who have been caring for societies torn apart by violence for many years. As I read their tender pastoral words I felt like I was being cared for by my older brothers in the faith, brothers who have long known the evil that now we understand as well.

The evil that is responsible for the events of yesterday is greater than the work of a handful of crazed madmen. It is the work of Satan. Only he can destroy human life on such catastrophic levels. Only Satan can tempt a nation to be terrorized.

So what are we to do about this evil? According to 1 Peter, we are called not to passivity, but to active resistance. "Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around looking for someone to devour" (5:8). And then Peter says, "Resist him." You can do that. You are not powerless.

How do you resist an evil that is so great it can turn skyscrapers into rubble? By keeping control of your heart. That is the only entrance evil has into our lives. That is the way the prowling devil lion devours a person. And that is how he makes men crazy enough to reek such destruction. They did not guard their hearts and the evil overcame them. All of the drama between good and evil is written in the human heart before it is played out in human history.

We resist evil by resisting fear. In verse seven we are told, "Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you." The devil cannot make you fear. That is a human choice, and no good decisions or actions will come out of fear. All of the news stories of courage we are starting to hear have come from ordinary men and women, like you, who spent years guarding their hearts from fear so there would be room in those hearts for courage. Ultimately, we defeat terrorism by refusing to be terrorized. That is why you are called to live out of fear's opposite, which is faith in God. It is your faith that will grant you courage and wisdom for facing this hour.

We resist evil by resisting rage. While anger is appropriate, and clearly God himself is angry today, to become enraged is to allow the enemy to convert us into his image. The difference in anger and rage is that anger is something you possess. Rage is something that possesses you. And being possessed is always

the work of the devil.

We resist evil by resisting despair. Already we have heard commentary saying that this is just the way it is. It's an age of anarchy and there is nothing to be done. That is not true. It's a lie from hell. While our national leaders sort through the complex decisions about what the country will do, we in the churches will remind the nation that God is not done making his own response to evil. "After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, support, strengthen and establish you" (5:10). This may be a very dark chapter of our story, but it is not the last chapter and God will lead us to a future filled with hope.

Hope! Hope for a better, safer world that looks more like the glorious kingdom of Christ. Choose hope in your heart. Choose it because you cannot be a source of hope to a broken world without hope in your heart. Choose it because greater is that within you than he that is roaming the world seeking whom he may devour.

If tonight your heart is filled more with fear than faith, more with rage than righteous anger, more with despair than hope, then do what the suffering Body of Christ has always done in such a time. Come to the table of the Lord Jesus Christ. Bring whatever you have in your heart even if you are not proud of it. For at this table we will witness the miraculous exchange again. We will give to Christ our fear, rage, and despair. And he will give us the grace of eternal life. Amen.