

Clergy Comment
Rev. David J. Huber
Plymouth UCC, Eau Claire

Hope, Not Fear

Five years ago I left my office across the street from the World Trade Center for the last time. I saw too many people jumping, and watched both towers come down. As I evacuated from the mayhem, Churchill's words after the Dunkirk evacuation echoed in my head, "We shall never surrender". Then Roosevelt's words came to me, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself". I remembered also Jesus' command to forgive. Slowly, on my long walk home, I forgave the terrorists. I returned to work a week later at an office near the Stock Exchange. Each day I walked through ranks of National Guard to look at the Statue of Liberty, a gift to remind this nation who we are, from a nation that inspired its revolution with the words "*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*". As long as she remained, I felt, so remained the hope of the words she bears. Words of freedom and the radical acceptance Jesus calls us to offer.

I prayed that America would rise up and respond to terrorist evil with those kinds of hope. But, even though many government and Christian leaders proclaim loudly their faith, Jesus' cup of hopeful imagination was shunned in favor of fear's albatross. This fear has us justifying evils we would otherwise never accept, such as pre-emptive war, torture, unlawful detention, racial profiling, and surrendering our freedoms. Instead of the loving Christian language I have cherished since childhood, I hear the language of the Crusades, the Inquisition, Manifest Destiny, and Christian and American triumphalism. We are offered a political agenda cloaked in Christian rhetoric just like radical Muslims cloak their political agenda in Islamic rhetoric, each boldly claiming God for their side and demonizing the other, instead of humbly seeking to be on God's side.

What this Christian wants to hear more of from our leadership are the words of Jesus: blessed are the meek, love your enemy, forgive seven times seventy times. The God I worship does not say to be afraid, but says to have hope because the world is God's and God's alone. I believe we Christians are called to resist surrendering to the too-easy path of the world's way of responding to evil through fear and engines of death, and to surrender ourselves, following the example of our Lord and savior, to the more difficult path of the cross: love, forgiveness, and especially hope.