

FROM THE PULPIT

Closeness to Jesus can bring peace to self, world

By The Rev. Brad Bryant

These are certainly challenging times in America, and around the world. In the midst of a struggling world economy we've experienced the horror of an intentional terrorist attack against our nation, and all of the resulting actions, reactions, fears and uncertainties that have unfolded since. We're even warned about possible tampering with the mail, food, and water supplies.

What should be our response? How do we as individuals, families, and nations appropriately respond to such horrific events, and remain true to the call of Jesus Christ to work toward peace and justice, healing and forgiveness?

Our church president, W. Grant McMurray, in an article written and published before the tragedies of Sept. 11, wrote the following thoughts in the September 2001 edition of our church magazine, the Herald: "We all understand that our culture is in the midst of revolutionary changes that sweep around us, and sometimes over

us, at an unimaginable pace. Observers of society talk about the impact of such rapid change on human beings. It can be both exhilarating and disorienting, forcing us to constantly adjust and adapt as new things come at us. Some face up to it decisively, determined to cope and shape the changes that come. Others recoil in fear and withdraw, unable to assimilate the many new things that come. It is in times of change that people most urgently seek the foundations of their lives. We turn to the things that give us stability and that define for us something of the essence of our beings. Things may swirl around us, but if the foundation is firm, it is possible to cope and even to flourish."

We can see the massive changes that have pounded upon our world and our lives in the wake of Sept. 11. And, as McMurray prophetically stated, people around the world are having to adapt to those changes — some in positive ways; some in fear. We've seen the courage and selfless giving from many rescuers and relief workers, doing

whatever they can to help bring order and recovery to the lives of individuals, families, companies and nations. We've witnessed tragic refugee problems in far corners of the world. We've seen struggles, as nations and individuals attempt to find appropriate ways to respond to acts of terror and destruction.

We've each found that in the midst of these tragic times, our need to "be together" is important. We're seeking out quality family time, sharing our hurts and fears with coworkers, talking with long-distance family. The comfort of relationships continues to help us cope.

Those who have chosen to be part of the "church family" have an extra set of relationships to help provide positive support during the uncertain times ahead. For those of you who are currently not part of a church family, let me encourage you to take that next step. For many, that decision has been on your "someday" list. Consider that "someday" has now arrived! Use this world situation to make the decision for yourself and your family, to begin

searching, investigating, and getting involved with a church family, and allowing God to take a place in your daily life.

No matter where you've been in your life, no matter how many "bad" decisions you've made, no matter what life situations you've found yourself in, no one is too "bad" to be accepted in a Christian faith community — to be loved and forgiven by the living Jesus Christ and His people. And as you search out and find those loving, Christ-centered communities, you will find a people — a new family — who will love you, and help you on your journey toward healing and reconciliation.

Do we have all of the answers? No way! Church is a place for sinners — people who have fallen short of the expectations of God — and ALL of us do fall short. But yet, even in our weakness and shortcomings, Jesus invites us to "come back home" to Him because He is the only one that does have all of the answers for your life, and wants to share them with you, his children. We find these answers through the presence

of His holy spirit, working directly in our lives, and through the eight sacraments of the church (baptism, confirmation, marriage, baby blessing, laying on of hands for healing, evangelist blessing, communion and ordination to ministry).

The members and friends of the worldwide Community of Christ offer you this relationship with Christ. We invite you to explore our people, our cultures, our worship, our community service, our focus on peace and justice, and most importantly, our best friend — Jesus.

How can Jesus bless you at this point in your life? That depends on the relationship you choose to have with Him. He has the blessings and tools that you need to help you survive and thrive in this world. He only waits for you to choose to allow Him to be your partner.

So, how do we respond? As individuals, families, and church communities, we're each called by God to help improve the world situation for the benefit of all persons. Participate in any way you can. Ask for help if you need to talk about your feel-

ings and fears. Volunteer your time in helpful organizations. Continue to donate blood or money to help meet the ongoing needs. Become a part of an organization that follows Jesus Christ, and promotes communities of joy, hope, love and peace.

Allow your new faith family to help you grow in your understanding of, and commitment to, Jesus Christ and His kingdom of peace and justice. Know that in the midst of even the worst situations, God can bring blessings and good into your life if we put our trust in Him.

God has created you as a unique individual, and put you in this particular time and place, to be blessed, and to be a blessing to others. Respond to that divine call in your life, and God will be freed to be much more active in your life, and those around you. Through His presence in your life, and your willingness to let him work with you, we will all be strengthened in our quest for a more just and peaceful world.

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