



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea” -- Psalm 46

September 11, 2001. Like many of you I remember exactly where I was when I heard the news that the United States had been attacked. I remember the confusion, fear, helplessness and anger of those days immediately following the attack and the deep sadness for the thousands of people who died.

That was fifteen years ago. A lot has happened in our nation and in the world. We have been at war. We have become habituated to terrorist threats and TSA security checks. We have adjusted to a new normal. We feel less secure.

This year “God’s Work. Our Hands Sunday” falls on September 11. We should take time to remember where we were on that terrible day fifteen years ago. But we should also take a look at where we are now. There are voices that clamor for suspicion and division. There are voices that promise that, by our own effort, we can guarantee our own security, by force if necessary. The sense of unity that arose out of the ashes of the Twin Towers has disappeared. This is not a good place to be, nor is it the place to which God has called us as a church.

Stephen Bouman, executive director for the ELCA Domestic Mission unit and former bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod, tells this story about one of the events of September 11, 2001. A pastor in the synod also served as a chaplain to the fire department. The pastor saw the first plane hit the first tower and ran to the site. When he arrived the firefighters were putting on their gear. The pastor gathered them together, marked the cross on their foreheads with oil and prayed. Then the firefighters ran into the building. The people who survived said they could see the crosses shining on the firefighters’ foreheads. In that great darkness and suffering the light of Christ appeared.

In baptism we have been marked with the cross of Christ. And we are sent into the dark places in the world. That is where we are and must be on September 11, 2016. God has given us God’s work of reconciliation. When we show up for our day of service in our yellow T shirts in our communities we must give witness to the love of Christ that is stronger than hate and the life of Christ that is stronger than death. May we, joined to the death and resurrection of Christ through baptism, be light for the world.

In God’s peace,

Elizabeth A. Eaton
ELCA Presiding Bishop