

Christmas 2001

Dear Family and Friends:

Henry V is Shakespeare's account of the English victory at the battle of Agincourt. The English king was suddenly confronted with a French force of overwhelming number. In the play, one of Henry's nobles, seeing the French spread out before him in full battle array, exclaimed that the odds were frightful—the English were greatly outnumbered. The king's reply to his loyal servant's outburst is a classic: "We are in God's hands, not theirs."

Henry's apt reply has ready application in our day. How surreal to watch planes crash into the World Trade Center, to hear of attacks on the Pentagon, and to have Capitol Police officers run into my office and order me out of the building immediately. A hijacked plane was twenty minutes outside of Washington and headed our way. The king's words echoed in my ears through the anthrax scares that came on the heels of 9/11. It was in the Hart Building, but more, it was also in Longworth ... and in our building. There was just a trace on a letter in Room 176, but more, the letter was full of it, and worse, it was weapons grade. Then it was in the ventilation system. What powers of extrapolation we have! As I watched the media coverage drone on and on, keeping us informed and misinformed as it turned out, I thought of Henry's demeanor on the field of Agincourt and of Gene Peterson's pointed translation of Psalm 46:10a: "Calm down, and learn that I am God."

What a year it has been! Evil is alive and well on planet Earth. Yet how good to see the outpouring of practical compassion at Ground Zero and elsewhere, the surge of patriotism nationwide, and a spike in spiritual interest. The impact of September 11 on the future is yet to be determined. We journey into the future with misty horizons and with potential jolting stops awaiting us. What comfort to know that we do not travel that road alone. We are in God's hands and no one else's.

Another year and we celebrate Christmas once again. I shudder to think of a world without a manger, a cross, an empty tomb, and a promise "to be with you always." How precious this season has become for me in an ever-increasing way. T.S. Eliot's lines keep returning to my mind:

Who is the third who always walks beside you?
When I count, there is only you and I together,
But when I look ahead up the road
There is always another walking beside you.

How thankful we are for that other who walks beside us, and for the season that celebrates his birth. This Yuletide, our thoughts and prayers go out to you, our family, and friends. May the peace of God be your ready supply and fortify your souls this Christmas and throughout the upcoming year. From our home to yours: Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.