



The morning the twin towers collapsed, my family was above the North Atlantic on Delta Flight 129. The first passenger to learn of the attacks was my mother. Because of a circulatory disorder, Mom spends most of her time during a long flight standing or walking up-and-down the aisles. One of the flight attendants, trying to hold back tears came up to where my mother was standing, and asked if she could please have a hug from her. When my mother asked the young lady if she were all right, the attendant whispered to Mom that United Flight 93 had just gone down in a Pennsylvania field under terrorist attack. Our stewardess's best friend, who was serving on board United 93 had just had her throat slit by a box-cutter. At that point the young woman desperately needed a hug from a grandmother.

Soon after, we landed in Gander, Newfoundland as number 29 in a total of 50 airplanes that lined up on the Gander airstrip. We remained on the plane for 27 hours. All cell phone and radio traffic was blocked, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police set up a security perimeter around the area. We knew that the twin towers had come down because of a terrorist attack, but that's all we were told. After spending a day, a night, and much of another day on the plane, we were taken to an emergency Red Cross shelter in Lewisporte, Newfoundland about an hour from Gander. This is where God started to work.

School-bus drivers who had been on strike, came off picket-line and drove for 24 hours straight to get us all to a safe place to sleep. Lewisporte has a population of just 4,000. Yet, they found lodging for 800 passengers from several flights. I'm not sure how many communities exist that would be willing to welcome 1 visiting stranger for every 5 residents. The local service organization, the Kinsmen of Notre Dame found a place for all 280 passengers on Delta 129. They housed and fed us for 4 days, set a phone and email center so we could contact our families. They brought in blankets, clothes, and toiletry items for us (nobody had been permitted to retrieve their bags from the plane – at one point my wife and I even ended up sharing the same boxer shorts!). The Canadian Army trucked in canvas battlefield gurneys so we were not sleeping on the floor. I and my family, all six of us were housed in a small classroom of the Calypso Foundation, a DSN Center that specializes in equipping adults who have special needs with job skills for integration in the wider community.

Shortly after midnight on Saturday, September 15, five days after the attack when American airspace was reopened, these wonderful people from this tiny Newfoundland town put together a caravan to get us all back to the Gander Airport. They never asked us for a penny. We didn't know it at the time, but the people of Newfoundland even put together a temporary facility to house the pets that were in the cargo holds of the various airliners stranded during those 5 days. I have never before or after met with such amazing generosity.

When we got home, I thought God had finished. I was wrong. A group of passengers had started to put together a fund for the people of Lewisporte to show our heart-felt gratitude. As a result, new computers were bought for the local school. St. James Anglican Church, where so many were housed was equipped with a new lighting system. And in February, 2002 I returned to Lewisporte as the representative for Delta 129, to commemorate the opening of the newly remodeled Calypso Foundation for Adults with Special Needs, which had been completely renovated with funds collected from passengers on our flight. You can read more about the experiences of my family and the passengers from Delta 129 and other stories from the stranded 10,000 in the book, *The Day the World Came to Town*, or on any number of commemorative websites.

You can find God even in the midst of violent attack, if you're willing to look for him. That's what happened in the passage for today from 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings. In 701 BC, the Assyrian King Sennacherib had reached the city walls of Jerusalem. His vast army had by this point taken 46 of the Southern Kingdom's fortified cities and sent more than 200,000 Jews into exile in Nineveh. The defeat of Judah's King Hezekiah and the doom of Jerusalem seemed assured. But then this strange man of God by the name of Isaiah speaks out for the first time in the Bible. And he effectively says, "Don't be afraid good people, for God is still here, and he will vanquish his children's foes." (See 2Ki.19:6, 20, 29-36) He only asks us to stand firm. (See Joshua 1:7-9)

That's what Paul is talking about at the end of Ephesians. The real threat to our wellbeing is not one of physical attack by earthly forces. No, Paul insists on reminding us that the real danger to our immortal souls comes from the spiritual realms. (See Eph.6:12) And it is not a powerful army, nor mutually assured destruction by way of nuclear weapons that will protect us against this particular enemy. No, our real protection lies in truth, and righteousness, and faith, the certain knowledge of our salvation, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the blessed Word of God. In this, we must stand firm, if we would remain truly free.

That's what Paul tells the Athenians in his famous speech on Mars Hill from the Book of Acts. He reminds us it is God and not man who has made all nations great and small. It is this God who allots the boundaries of our lands, boundaries of both time and space. And this God is never far from each one of us. For it is indeed "in him that we live and move and have our being." (See Acts 17:28; Job 12:10) So it is in this God and in His most Blessed Son that we find our refuge. We must stand firm in Him.

On Saturday, September 15, 2001 on our way back to Atlanta, we flew over Ground Zero. It was still smoldering, and you could clearly see the wreckage of the Twin Towers, even from thousands of feet up. Captain Bob Dun our pilot, who retired from Delta Airlines immediately after that flight asked the passengers seated on the left-hand side of the airplane if they would be kind enough to stand up for a moment and give the others a chance to come over to the east-facing windows in order to pay their respects. Delta Flight 129 had embarked from Shannon Airport in Ireland the previous Tuesday. I've never seen so many people make the sign of the cross as all these Irish men and women looked down from the sky at Ground Zero, praying silently about the events of the previous 5 days. It's an image forever seared in my brain.

The other thing which those days have made an indelible part of my life is my attachment to the Bible. My own small travelling Bible which my wife had given me a few years before had been packed in my checked luggage before we left Ireland. So, for 5 days I had gone completely without God's word, at a time in my life when I needed it sorely. From that day forward, I have never taken any flight without first making absolutely certain that come what may, I have God's word somewhere on my person. Those days served more than anything else to sharpen my focus as to how critical to life is the comfort of Holy Scripture. And it was in those days as well that the whispering in my heart began to become a roaring in my soul. I had seen Satan at work, and had witnessed the response of God through the incredible acts of Christian love on the part of His faithful children. In Lewisporte, Newfoundland, at the very edge of the continent, in that postage-stamp corner of North America, I began to clearly understand how my steps were being directed toward a life of ordained service in the Gospel of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear ones, as we mark the events of 15 years ago, we need to understand how He was, and is, still here. God is always, just as Paul says, very near at hand. And you can find Him even in the heart of darkness. So let us not be distracted by the fleeting challenges of this temporal life. For God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble, and He will not be overthrown. If we can just stand firm... stand firm, be still, and know that He is God. James Barhill+ 9-05-16