

# Hearing the Voices of 9/11

Today marks the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of four coordinated terrorist attacks on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001.

Using four hijacked passenger airliners, 19 members of the Islamic terrorist group Al-Qaeda killed 2,996 people, injured more than 6,000 others, and caused at least \$10 billion in infrastructure and property damage.

American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 were crashed into the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center complex in New York City, while American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon. The fourth plane, United Airlines Flight 93, initially steered toward Washington, D.C., and crashed into a field in Stoneycreek Township near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after its passengers tried to overcome the hijackers.

Passengers on the planes quickly figured out what was happening and anticipated their fate. A few years ago, Peggy Noonan, a columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*, recounted the contents of some of the voicemails and messages left for loved ones in their final moments of life. Here are some:

- United Flight 93 attendant Ceecee Lyles, 33, in an answering-machine message to her husband: "Please tell my children that I love them very much. I'm sorry, baby, I wish I could see your face again."
- On American Airlines Flight 77, winging toward the Pentagon, political commentator Barbara Olson called her husband, U.S. Solicitor General Ted Olson. She discreetly tried to share information with him about how the situation was unfolding. "It's going to come out OK. I love you."
- On United Flight 93, passenger Mark Bingham called his mother and got her voicemail. "I want you to know I love you very much, and I'm calling from the plane. We've been taken over. There are three man who say they've got a bomb."
- Fire Captain Walter Hynes, just before rolling out of Ladder Company 13 and heading toward the towers, left this message on his wife's voicemail: "Honey, it's real bad. I don't know if we'll make it out. I want to tell you that I love you, and I love the kids."
- Melissa Harrington Hughes, 31, who was stuck in one of the towers, called her newlywed husband, Sean, who was asleep in San Francisco, and left this message: "Sean, it's me. I just wanted to let you know I love you and I'm stuck in this building in New York. There's a lot of smoke, and I just wanted to let you know that I will love you always."
- Peter Hanson, a passenger on United Flight 175, called his father. "I think they intend to go to Chicago or someplace and fly into a building. Don't worry, Dad. If it happens, it will be very fast."

(more)



- Also on United flight 175, Brian Sweeney called his wife, got the answering machine, and told her they'd been hijacked. "Hopefully, I'll talk to you again, but if not, have a good life. I know I'll see you again someday."
- On United Flight 93, Tom Burnett called his wife, Deena. "We're all going to die, but three of us are going to do something. I love you, honey."
- On that same flight, Todd Beamer spent several minutes on the phone with a cellular customer service representative, Lisa Jefferson. Together, they prayed, "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive our trespasses, even as we forgive those who have trespassed against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen." Then, turning his attention back to his fellow passengers, he said, "Are you ready? Let's roll."

Of these and other messages, Ms. Noonan observed: "Something terrible had happened. Life was reduced to its essentials. Time was short. People said what counted, what mattered. It has been noted that there was no record of anyone calling to say, 'I never liked you,' or 'You hurt my feelings' ... Amazingly – or not – there is no record of anyone damning the terrorists or saying, 'I hate them.' No one said anything unneeded, extraneous or small. These were people saying, essentially, in spite of my imminent death, my thoughts are on you, and on love."

Today it is Sept. 11, 2020, but the power of those messages still strikes at the heart. And raises some questions ...

How about you – and me? If all we had left were a few moments and a cell phone, what would our concerns boil down to? Who would we call? What would we say?

No doubt, "I love you" would be *the* important message. Let's not wait, and let's say it often.

*Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes (James 4:14 NIV).*

– Beecher Hunter