

A brief reflection on 9/11

It was just another Tuesday, at the start of my junior year of college. "Hanging by a Moment" by Lifehouse was still playing a lot on the radio. For the first time in my life, I didn't have to take any math or science classes; I could just focus on what I really wanted to study. Internet connections were getting faster. Extra-curricular activities were picking up. There was a guy I liked. Autumn was in the air, and that had become my favorite season, after spending a childhood allergic to it. Then the news broke – and with it, my heart and the hearts of so many others. It felt as though reality had become unglued; up was down, and nightmares invaded the daylight, as panic kicked in at the sight of every low-flying plane.

After the initial shock, I did the only thing that made sense at the time. I went to Ewell Hall on campus, found a room with a piano, closed the door, and wrote a song that cried out to heaven, never expecting that heaven would answer back.

Deep breath. Classes continued. The radio played different songs. A couple of months later, I stopped going to church, my belief in God shaken. I wasn't even sure I'd ever believed to begin with. The refrain of that song I'd composed in Ewell Hall was "did you see God?" I really wanted to know: was "it" – god, force, whatever - there, in the midst of so much evil and suffering?

January of 2002. That's when the Turn came. That's when He found me.

There, in the dying embers of my belief, the last thing I ever expected to happen actually happened: I fell in love. There was no question that could stand in the way, no nightmare that could steal from His everlasting light, no evil that was bigger than His goodness. I tumbled into Love: into that deeper-than-happy, peaceful-beyond-understanding, glimpse-of-heaven kind of love. When it made no sense to find joy, it found me anyway. And I trusted it that much more because, as C.S. Lewis wrote so eloquently, it surprised me so well.

Falling in love – even with God – still doesn't yield all the answers, though. And all these years later, I do not pretend to have easy answers to the horror of that day. There are no such answers, because even the greatest response to the evil in the world is in the shape of a cross. No one promised easy. We were promised life, though. Not just regular life, but **abundant** life. And not merely as an escape, or as a kind of reward at the end of a long, hard slog. Abundant

life even in the here and now. It's a life swept up into the mystery of His unfailing mercies, which are "new every morning"; it's a life anchored in the gratitude for the simplest wonders of creation – from the stars to the blades of grass, and all the goodness in between; it's living out our days in the refuge of His Sacred Heart, which offers a hope that is sweeter than any love song that could be written. Trust me, I'm a songwriter, and I've tried.

And speaking of songs, there is a melody that has been woven into every era of the human story. Can you hear it, even now? He sings to us, over and over, in the catastrophe, in the heartache, on the beautiful days, and on the terrible days: "behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."