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## A PERSONAL WORD FOR YOU from Mack McCarter

### “From Allendale To Afghanistan And Back Again: The Power Of Applied Love”

One of Dickens’ characters, in extolling the virtues of a certain east London lodging, gushed that it “offered an unrestricted view across the street!” At times the events that pound us and the circumstances that would seem to devour us call for such an immediacy of reflex and reaction that our vision is compressed to the scope of that hotel of Dickens. When you are threatened, you deal with the business at hand. Survival needs squeeze out the long view. Rightfully so.

But one of the gifts to the human race, one which has lifted us above the world of mere reflex, is the God-given capacity to “see” and to tell what we see in a clear and simple way. Our reactions save us, but it is *our ability to reflect* that grows us, develops us, and gives us the stature that we call “spirit.” We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Like all life on this earth, we are subject to events, but quite unlike the rest of life, we can analyze, we can interpret meaning, and we can project a course of future triumph. That capacity is a great gift. And like any faculty, it must be practiced in order to be perfected. Right now, our suffering is immense in the face of tragedy simply incomprehensible. But suffering should never be the thief set to rob us of that which makes us and keeps us human – our faith and our hope and most of all our love. So how do we now rise up and stand in the ashes around us to continue our journey of becoming the persons that God intended for us to be? How do we firmly grasp the rungs of faith and hope and love and climb with renewed strength?

I believe that we are called to react, but our reactions must be birthed by our reflections. It is the way to rise above the present and it is the way to march us boldly into that which is ultimately realizable – “a new heaven and a new earth.” We must see more than across the street. Let me share with you what I see in the hope that you will share your own thoughts and insights and then together the clarity of vision will give us the “lamp unto our feet” which will be God’s guidance for our steady steps of faith. Here are my convictions.

***I believe that we are firmly in the hands of the One who is leading us and molding us into a global neighborhood, or even a “family.”*** The hope of God is unmistakable. Isaiah saw “all nations gathered” at the Holy Mountain of God. Jesus prayed that we “should be one” just as he and the Father were one in his priestly prayer. And he taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” In fact the entire theme of the bible is the coming, the establishing of The Kingdom of God. It is a kingdom of peace, and harmony. It is seen as a family where all are brothers and sisters with one Father. (This is why William Barclay described the mission of Jesus as one of seeking to “familyize the world.”)

***I believe that the course of history has clearly shown this “coming together” as the goal to which we are tending.*** See the movement. It runs from family into clan, from clan into tribe, from tribe into village, from village into town, from town into city, from city into

state, from state into nation, and now from nation into world. We stand at the threshold of a global village/family. History has now seen us leap together in terms of communications. We can now see everyone, anywhere on this globe, any time. We can all talk together. History has seen us with a global economy. No longer isolated in our market places, what effects one nation spills economically into the others. We have come together in so many ways, only our relationships lag. But we are moving ineluctably toward a world wide community. The sweep of God's hand in history will not be stayed.

***I believe that all terrorism is the product of placing self above community.*** It is a refusal to live that life of community. It is the inevitable reaction born of fear and that fear is the base element of expressed narcissism. It is the perverse children playing to their own tune in the market place. It is self-centeredness. It is sin. There is no doubt in my mind that the psychological profile of so-called Islamic, Jewish, Christian, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist extremists will all be the same. But each will express their fear of being "incorporated" by the community in the only place for them to hide – their cultural expression of religion. From the white-supremacy groups that wrap themselves in the symbols of the Christian Faith, to the separatists of the Jewish world quoting Torah, to all of the perversions of community faith, the extremists typify the reaction of self above others. "My self" easily bleeds over into "my group" and gives the appearance of community when in actuality these reactions "are nothing more than a loose conglomeration of independent atoms dancing without touching one another in creative love." They do not seek to build. They have nothing that ultimately bonds them together. They only come together from their hovels of pitiful self-centered fear in order to destroy a perceived threat. They are not lovers of life, but lovers of death. If the threat ceases, they turn on each other as they retreat back to their little huts of self.

History has not dealt kindly with these reactions. The march to community has continued. "Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will find it."

***I believe that the lessons we have learned in a local neighborhood as we seek renewal through community can be applied in a global neighborhood without missing a step.*** Here is the key. We must have safety in a local neighborhood before we can reach out in caring, and we must reach out in caring if we are to experience the product of safety, which is the state of security. There must be a policing of the neighborhood terrorist if we are to be safe, then feel secure. But we cannot just "sweep the house of the demon and leave it empty." We must do more than weed. More weeds will grow. We must find the way to build the capacity of the people within the neighborhood to create an ever renewing infrastructure of mutually enhancing relationships so that the conditions can produce new possibilities.

We will police Afghanistan, and help with the world. Rightfully so. We now know that we are connected to the world, even to those that we don't wish to be connected to. (John Donne was prescient!) But once the policing is in place, how do we begin to immunize the young lives from the susceptibility to the messages of self-centered hate and fear? We must take Allendale to Afghanistan. How do we do this? In our next issue of *Renewal News*, I will offer some first steps. Please join us in the march for true community. Please pray.