

The Peace of Christ
Janet's 9/11 Testimony
September 11, 2011

For 10 years, I worked across the street from the World Trade Center. Many of you don't know that about me. I was a business manager at a global investment bank. I lived my life in and around those towers.

During graduate school, I had a quiet study nest on the top floor of the North Tower. After I began my career, I attended weekly classes in the towers, along with many conferences. I had friends who worked there. Many were from war-torn countries. They had come here, hoping to find a peaceful life for their families. I interacted daily with vendors in the towers – we exchanged laughter and stories, and I grew fond of them. My friends and I spent hours in the World Trade Center shops and cafes. We especially loved the summer outdoor cookouts on the plaza. I went in and out of the subway stations and walked across the footbridges every day.

The World Trade Center was just part of a larger community. Lower Manhattan was its own world, different from the rest of New York City. I loved it there. It was more than skyscrapers. A lot of life took place in and around those buildings. I loved to walk at lunchtime along the waterfront. There were so many unique places to explore. My friends and I had our favorites – favorite shopkeepers, favorite café owners, favorite park benches. But we also delighted in new discoveries, just around the corner. We even had a sweet little grocery store where we could pick up a salad and go eat at the marina park, and watch the kids play. In the midst of the big, noisy city and corporate frenzy, we carved out an amazing little home in a vibrant community with some of the most wonderful and loving people I've ever known.

Ten years ago, all of that changed. In one moment, the ground was ripped out beneath us. Friends died. Our community crumbled. Our lives were turned inside out, and we would never be the same again. My heart was torn into pieces.

For the first year, I was one big ball of emotion. Deep emotions tore at my heart like knife wounds, over and over. Shock. Hurt. Anger. Terror. And Grief – deep, unending grief, with nowhere to turn. I had horrible nightmares. I couldn't breathe; I couldn't swallow. I was paralyzed with fear. It took a year just to put some of the pieces back into place, to even begin to think how to live again. And still, no peace. I began to purposely forget all the good things I'd known in my life in Lower Manhattan. I began to shut out life. It was easier to stuff everything and just go through the motions.

For a short time, I found solace by diving into the Lower Manhattan rebuilding effort. This was our chance to come together and plan a future even better than what we'd known before. But in the end, corruption took control of the process, and my dreams for a new hometown were shattered. I was disillusioned and angry, and I gave up.

For the first few years after the tragedy, God allowed me to keep myself locked away. Whenever someone mentioned 9/11, I would leave the room, and spend the next hour crying, until I felt numb enough to be around people again. On the anniversaries of the tragedy, I would hide.

Four years ago, I began to actively seek the Lord for healing in other areas of my life. But I wasn't ready to ask Him for healing concerning 9/11. There was too much stuffed behind that door. It was dark and painful, and I would just as soon keep that door closed.

But then something happened. Three years ago, I took a job as a language arts parapro at Eagle Ranch, a group home for at-risk teens. On the 7th anniversary of the tragedy, I walked into the classroom to find that the teacher had assigned the children to journal about the event. That huge ball of emotion came rushing to the surface. I had to leave the room. That's when I realized it was time to seek healing. The children had been 7 years old when the towers were hit. It was part of their history that they needed to learn. I needed to get to a place of healing where I could share with them, and not hide.

I spent that whole day in prayer. One of the images that had haunted me the most were the people who jumped from the towers. They were just like me. Their offices faced mine across the street. They came in that morning, got their coffee, sat down at their desks ... and 10 minutes later they had to make an unthinkable decision. I asked God to show me where He was in the midst of that. He spoke to my heart, and showed me they were lifted by angels and carried into His loving hands. That was the beginning of healing for me, and of comfort. But I still didn't have peace.

As Jesus says in Scripture, the peace He offers is different from the world's peace. Some situations are too big to find resolution or understanding. Sometimes our grief is so overwhelming there is nothing the world can offer. Only Jesus can meet us in that place.

You might not know this about me, but I've been a writer all of my life. I've written articles and books. I used to have such a passion for it. Lately, I've wanted to start writing again, but it's been such a struggle. A month ago, I asked God why. I asked Him, "Lord, when was the last time I felt joy and freedom in writing?" Instantly He showed me – it was the week before the tragedy. When the towers were hit, I shut down as a writer. I had forgotten this, but the Lord reminded me that I had made a vow never to write again.

We were also coming up on this 10th anniversary, and I realized I'm tired of hiding from all of this. Between that, and the desire to write again, I went to a counseling session three weeks ago. Honestly, I thought this was too big even for God. But I went by faith. I knew the depths of healing God had brought to my life, and I know what His Word promises. So I went by faith, asking God to heal me. In the end, God not only showed me that my 9/11 trauma wasn't too big for Him to heal. He also poured healing into me far greater than anything I could have imagined.

In that session, my counselor prayed with me, for Jesus to meet me in my place of deepest sorrow. The Lord is so gentle when He brings healing. He doesn't make us relive old trauma. Instead, He surrounds us with His presence and brings comfort and peace. The biggest thing that happened to me in that counseling session was that Jesus made me aware, deep in my heart, that He felt every single thing I felt; that He intimately knew my pain and my sorrow; that He was holding me and crying with me; and that the comfort and strength of His presence was real and solid and deep.

In that place of deepest sorrow, where Jesus met me, I found peace. Real peace; lasting peace. The peace that only Christ can give us. It is His peace in us that brings healing, and new joy in life. My sorrow cannot be resolved by my mind, by my experiences, by anything the world can offer. But the peace of Christ, that now fills my heart, allows me to live, and have life, and

have joy again, in the aftermath of unthinkable grief and sorrow. I will never forget. But now I can live. And now, I can also remember fondly all those joyful times I had shut out.

As Christy was preparing her message for this day, she felt the Lord nudging her to ask me to share. She was worried, at first, that this might be too hard for me. That's when I shared with her the peace Jesus brought to my heart in that counseling session three weeks ago. And while I will never forget that day 10 years ago, and the lives that were lost, and the lives turned inside out, I'm standing here now to tell you: "I'm okay," because Jesus has given me His peace.

I don't know what your sorrow is. It may be connected with this tragedy, or with other moments of pain and grief that you've experienced. But I invite you today to let the God of peace touch your heart – with His peace, that surpasses all understanding.