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Easter 3A
Peace, Seattle
May 8, 2011 epk
Luke 24:13-35

FROM WAY OF DEATH TO PATH OF LIFE

Crucified and risen Lord, you come into our midst, wounds and all, to offer yourself in your holy meal. Break bread with us, O Lord, and open our eyes. Enlarge our vision and our comprehension of your presence with us, and your mission of wringing resurrection from death and destruction. Amen.

There are some events in our lives that leave wounds that will never fully heal no matter how much time passes, no matter how much water flows under the bridge.

Some of those wounds are the result of personal losses and tragedies we've suffered.
These are plotted on an internal map that forever reminds us:
- THIS IS WHERE HE SAID HIS LAST GOODBYE
- THIS IS WHEN WE HAD OUR LAST PHONE CALL
- THIS IS WHAT WE WERE DOING WHEN WE HEARD THE NEWS

Sometimes the epicenter of this map is traceable to one traumatic event. But more often than not this geography of grief is delineated through time and the accumulation of smaller wounds and losses.

When the loss happens, when another mark is made on that map, we may be left wondering if we'll ever move from that place again. If we'll ever be able to step beyond that event or walk past that awful place without being caught up in the loss all over again, without having to stop and pay homage, or speed ourselves away.

Some wounds come from our individual experiences of loss, and some wounds originate from traumas shared with a larger slice of humanity—a community, a people, a nation…

That's the territory we've been traversing this last week.

Nearly ten years after the events of September 11th we entered the vortex again when President Obama announced last Sunday night that Osama bin Laden had been killed.

That news has pulled us back to that clear day in 2001 when we kept vigil in front of TVs and radios, watching in disbelief as the Twin Towers burned and, ultimately, collapsed.
- We sensed the chaos, we witnessed the panic, we heard the rising body count.
- We saw the grief-stricken faces of the families of the missing. We prayed.

It's been a week of wide-ranging emotions—of solemn recognition by some, of euphoric celebration by others—and a terribly trying one for those whose loved ones perished on 9/11.

The RANGE OF RESPONSES we've heard from people who lost loved ones that day has been revealing.
- Some have agreed that, yes, justice has finally been done,
- Some have said this death, though justified, is still no cause for celebration,
- Many have said no death—not even bin Laden's—can bring closure,
- Some have found their wounds still so raw that they can't bear to say anything.

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The circumstances around the daring raid and the intelligence that led to it have raised many more questions than answers.

Among other things, we wonder how the world's most wanted man could hide in plain sight for so long, within a military town only 30 miles from Pakistan's capitol city?

It's much too soon to tell what all this means. All we can do is hope that in hindsight it will all become clearer. Yet, this much seems true: in the wake of popular protests across the Arab speaking world this spring, al-Qaeda's campaign of violent jihad has lost its footing.

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NOW, LET'S LOOK AT OUR GOSPEL AND ASK IF THERE'S ANYTHING HERE THAT MIGHT BEAR UPON THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT IN WHICH WE FIND OURSELVES.

TURNING TO THE 24th CHAPTER OF LUKE, WHAT DO WE FIND?
Two disciples of Jesus traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus, trying their best to put distance between themselves and the city that had become, in the wake of their Lord's crucifixion, a symbol of death.

Their leader had been betrayed and deserted. Justice had been stood on its ear.
The City that had once welcomed him with open arms had turned, chewed him up and spit him out.

Cleopas and his companion had to distance themselves from all that and so they go. And on their way a stranger joins them. It isn't long before the three of them are caught up in a conversation about what has happened and what it all means.

They don't know what to make of him, really. On an intuitive level they're drawn to him, but they don't recognize who he is… until he breaks the bread.

With the breaking of the bread, their eyes are opened, their hearts set free, their intuition confirmed, and their world of death is transformed into life.

What happens next? They rush back to Jerusalem that very same night, unable to contain themselves; unable to do anything but TELL THE STORY! The Risen One has turned on their vision. He will be with them always.

During these 50 days of Easter, and this Sunday in particular, as the events of 9/11 and the hatred that generated them have charged back into our lives, we come face to face with the heartbeat of our Christian faith: **the resurrection.**

Responding to the May 1 news of bin Laden's death, our presiding bishop Mark S. Hanson writes:

> Sisters and brothers in Christ,
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> The death of Osama bin Laden is an occasion for solemn remembrance. We remember the lives of all whose deaths resulted from his choosing hatred and violence. We stand with those who continue to mourn the death of loved ones while giving thanks for their lives, their love and their faith. We also continue to hold in prayer all whose service in the military, in government and in humanitarian and peacemaking activities contribute to a safer and more prosperous world.

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> At the same time we also recall who we are: people baptized into Christ, freed to serve our neighbors…called as Christ's ambassadors of reconciliation…[to support] God's work of restoring community. We engage our neighbors of other faiths, including our Muslim neighbors near and far, in respectful, searching dialogue and shared commitment to build a world that reflects God's will for peace with justice. We pray for our neighbors, even those who are our enemies.
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> Most of all, in these 50 days of celebrating Christ's resurrection, joy finds its fullest and deepest expression not over a human death but in God's promise to unite all things in heaven and on earth, to reconcile the human family and to bring God's reign of peace. Confident in what God has promised, we witness our resolve against any act of violence in the name of religion and our renewed commitment of service to the neighbors and world God so deeply loves.[1]

In the verses which follow our gospel, Jesus appears before his followers and they are once again overcome with fear. Once more he calms their fear by speaking PEACE, and then, he shows them his wounded hands and feet.

Why does he do so? Why expose his hands and feet? So they can recognize him? Yes, but there's something more to it than that. It's as if Christ is saying:

- Resurrection is not about forgetting the past;
- Resurrection does not mean that all wounds have disappeared or that all bad memories have been erased.
- Rather, resurrection is about no longer being help captive to the past, no longer being in bondage to whatever power of whatever description would try to kill us, control us, harm us, or push us into the grave.

The reality of resurrection in our lives, in our community, is a truth that pulls us into the future with hope, even when hope appears slim.

As we gather around the Table this morning, Christ invites us to bring along those charts and maps we carry which mark the places of our grief and loss.

Meeting him here we bring, as well, our collective grief over all that was lost on 9/11, our anxiety over threats that still abide, and our hope that, perhaps, the tide is turning.

Together we place these crude offerings, each one, at the feet of our Risen Lord.

In the breaking of the bread, Christ opens our eyes and clears our vision, turning our cities of death, into refuges of life. He is our safety, our healing, our wholeness. We come to him—we eat and drink—and find our feet on the path of life. AMEN.

[1] For news release, go to: http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Communication-Services/News/Releases.aspx?a=4759