

About Osama bin Laden's Death

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The news came in a flash Sunday evening, and most, if not all, of us have hardly had time enough to adjust to the seemingly surreal revelation by President Obama that Osama bin Laden is dead. The death of bin Laden brings to partial closure a long and painful chapter in the struggle against terrorism. The responses we have are natural and multitudinous: pride in the military's success in fulfilling a mission; gladness that one of the premier princes of evil-doing has been halted; relief that one who had caused unfathomable heartache will no longer give orders to cause further heartache; dazed benumbing in the face of the on-going conundrum of terrorism; fearful uncertainty because stopping one individual does not eradicate a cabal of hatred; rueful resignation because the death of bin Laden does not bring back to life even one person among those lost on September 11, 2001, or among the thousands who have died in Iraq and Afghanistan; puzzlement and inner conflict because killing and death are ultimately antithetical to the essence of the Judeo-Christian heritage. This is an emotionally complicated moment. Which is not unlike most of our other moments.

Three things are for sure, it seems to me, in all moments:

(1) One response we all can make is to *be prayerful*, even more prayerful than we have been over the past nine and a half years. "We are as we pray," I have said to many who have asked what to do in such circumstances. Communications with our Maker, Redeemer, and Sustainer are always in order and never more so that in an emotionally complicated time.

(2) We also can *remember*. Frederick Buechner's guidance is consistently wise: memory is one of the most sacred acts of the human community. Let us remember the precious lives that have been lost and the precious lives that we enjoy

now. Let us remember the families who lost loved ones in London and Tanzania and Kenya and elsewhere because of bin Laden's orders, spanning two decades. Let us remember the valiant vigilance of those who put themselves in harm's way to contain and control terrorism's merciless mayhem. Let us remember all the children and how we are to protect them so that they can have a future.

(3) We can *dig deep into our faith*, with caution and reserve and humility. Our faith teaches us that we can never revel in death or killing. At least not in Jesus' name, not in the name of the Prince of Peace. We are people of life-giving faith and proponents of healing and the possibilities of loving forgiveness, even of enemies. Am I glad that bin Laden has been stopped? Yes. Am I thankful for the care of our nation's armed forces? Yes. Am I relieved that one of the most heinous evil-doers in the course of my lifetime has been relegated to the ignominy he deserves? Absolutely. Yet and still, I am called, as I believe all Christians are called, to plumb the rich depths of Jesus' way of life and love for the ultimate answers to life's most perplexing challenges. And in this regard I know that bin Laden's death will not finally stymie the hatred of those whose twisted version of Islam compels them to continue their murderous ways. As Martin Luther King, Jr. keenly noted, "The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it... Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

So, I will pray and remember and dig deep into faith. And I encourage you to do the same. We are not done with the troubling travail of terrorism. For a moment we have reason to take a breath. May it be a breath imbued by the Spirit of God who will inspire us to transform the world so that terrorism is unthinkable and killing no longer drives the story of our fragile humanity's search for peace.

**This presentation was shared as part of Community's Wednesday evening chapel service on May 4, 2011.*