

"Hour of Lead - Hope for Restoration"

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September 11, 2001, a day that began with the mundane pattern of daily life - morning coffee, thoughts about the day ahead, good-byes to loved ones and a return to work. Once again, I am driving south from Minnesota toward Iowa. Unsuspecting, unknowing, I turn on the radio. Incomprehensible, mind numbing reports of terror, death and destruction come from the voice. "Where we are on this day," says the voice, "will be etched forever in our memories."

The voice speaks of symbols of American identity and power destroyed. The voice speaks of this day as one of "infamy" compared to Pearl Harbor. Words fail me and then, the invocation of despair, "Please, please, do not let this be happening." Arising in these first moments of disbelief, the simplest prayer of all, "Help! Help us now!"

Both relieved to be caught in the pattern of my daily life and holding back the fear and deep sorrow, I pass the road sign: "Hope: 1 Mile" but the destination marker seems cruel in this moment. I ask myself, "Where is hope now?" This is what the poet Emily Dickinson calls, "The Hour of Lead, remembered, if outlived."

In the few days that have passed, numbness is giving way to the emotions of deep grief - sadness, despair, fear, anxiety, anger, loneliness, isolation, emptiness. As our lives are touched personally through connections with people we know who have died, with people who know people who have died, we are interconnected by the circles of our grief. In our collective grief, we are reminded how interconnected we are within the web of our existence. Today, that interdependent web of all existence feels torn. Before this week, we have felt shielded from the hatred and destruction of the kind of terrorism that strikes in distant parts of the world. What we believed belonged somewhere else has come to us. Today, we face the terrible pain of realization that hatred in one part of the world connects all of us to that hatred.

Acknowledging the diverse spheres of our religious and secular communities, this is my meditation and hope for restoration in the days, months and years to come:

Our loved ones have died. Our symbols of power are destroyed. Terrorism rips the heart out of our lives. We have lost our sense of security and trust. We feel separated from right relations with ourselves, our loved ones, our communities and our interconnected world. We feel numbness, despair, denial, anger, and outrage. We are tempted to rush to judgment and revenge.

In the hour of our despair, let us express our grief, but not become our grief. Let us acknowledge our fears, but not become our fears. Let us remember our history, but not repeat the folly of our history. As we recall the infamy of Pearl Harbor and compare it to the evil of these days, let us not rush to condemn all people here and abroad who are from or in the Arab or Muslim

communities and countries. As we turn for comfort to our communities of support, whether religious or secular, let us not forget to turn outward as well to embrace those who are different from us. Our individual communities can work together to bring respect for differences to a world ripped asunder by the narrow and parochial determination to reject the most fundamental tenet of all existence: we are all connected to the web of life.

In the days and months and years ahead, help us to understand and remember that the human spirit refuses to be dominated by terror. The torn fabric of the web that connects us all, will be rewoven.

May we find ways to open our hearts to cross the borders of human encounters to transform hated and indifference into compassion, despair into hope, intolerance into understanding and violence into peace. So May It Be.

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