

We witnessed history being made last Sunday night. Osama bin Laden is dead. This man devoted to murder and destruction in his perversion of Islam is no longer a threat to peace in the world. While I do not rejoice in anyone’s death, even the death of an enemy, I am thankful and grateful for this good news.

How did you hear the news? I was watching the Phillies, enjoying a good book, and winding down after a terrific Youth Sunday. Then the announcer said something like, “We’ve just learned that American forces have killed Osama bin Laden. Tune in to CNN for more breaking news.”

At this point, the game no longer mattered even to the broadcasters. They began to show scenes of the crowd - a woman reading the news on her Blackberry, a man wearing a USA jersey jumping up and down in the aisle. The crowd swelling into chants of “USA, USA” as the news spread through Twitter, Facebook, email, and good old word of mouth. “Have you heard the breaking news?”

We were watching evangelism; the sharing of good news. One of our core values, “the great ends of the church,” in fact, the very first one, is “the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of the world.” The event of last Sunday and the reverberations of that event invite us to renew our commitment to that core value. We have breaking news and if we do not report it, it will not be known. It may be old news to us, but in a post-Christian, pluralistic, multi-cultural world, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is breaking news.

Jesus will show us the way on the road to Emmaus.

## ✦ THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

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The journey begins where hope ends. *Luke 24:21 (NRSV) We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*<sup>1</sup> Blue September skies turn black as the Twin Towers fall. We had hoped that terror could not touch us, that we were safe. The journey begins where hope ends.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.  
1 Peter 1:17-23                      Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 Luke 24:13-35

The road to Emmaus is the original road to nowhere. It’s where we find ourselves when our hopes have been dashed. Our loved one fought hard and fought well, but the disease was too much. “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” a prayer, and it’s over. We’re on the road to Emmaus. The boss calls us into their office at the end of the day. We’d hoped the layoffs were over, but there’s one more. We’re on the road to Emmaus.

*Luke 24:21 (NRSV) We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.<sup>2</sup>*

Watching the various reactions to the news of bin Laden’s death, I was struck by the fact that the closer folks were to the events of 9/11; the first responders who went into the Towers; the family members who lost loved ones at the Pentagon and on Flight 93; the closer they were, the more reflective they were. His death brought a certain conclusion for them, but they weren’t jubilant. There was a measure of justice, but it wasn’t enough. It didn’t put their world back together. It didn’t redeem.

Redemption puts our world back together. Redemption renews our hope. Redemption is what we long for when we’re on the road to Emmaus.

Our longing for redemption is not particular to Christians or to Americans. It is a universal human longing. It is common ground on which we all stand; common ground on the road to Emmaus.

#### ✦ BREAKING NEWS

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We’re not alone. We’re not on our own. Jesus is the one who redeems. He’s with us here. He’s with us now. He shows us the way on the road to Emmaus.

Watching the news spread on Sunday night reminded me of what evangelism is and what it isn’t.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Evangelism is not coercion. It's not manipulating people so they will think like us and live like us. That is the way of bin Laden not the way of Christ. It's not about having power and influence over people. It's not about saving our church so that we will survive. It's not about boosting church attendance and church budgets. That is the way of bin Laden and not the way of Christ.

Anytime we share our faith for what we can get out of it; we turn our backs on the way of Christ and go our own way down the road to Emmaus. No wonder we resist! No wonder we say nothing! Coercion and manipulation are old news. We've had our fill of that old news and then some! That's what put us on the road to Emmaus!

Here is what evangelism is – it is recognizing the risen Christ in our midst and pointing him out. It is being open to those encounters when we say, *Luke 24:32 (NRSV) “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”*<sup>3</sup> Evangelism is entering into the experiences of our companions on the road. We meet Christ together on common ground. We may share breaking news with them. They may share breaking news with us. Together, we meet the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus.

Does this mean we have all the answers? Does this solve all life's problems? No. Evangelism points to the hope that there is an answer, a purpose, a meaning to it all, and we can find it. We can know it. Evangelism points to the hope that there is more to life than a problem to be solved. Evangelism points to the one whose death and resurrection are the decisive turning point in history. Nothing will be the same. Anything and everything can change and will change. God is making all things new!

Here's an example of evangelism:

On March 9, 1965, Dr. King led a second symbolic march to Edmund Pettus bridge. That evening segregationists beat three ministers who had joined the

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<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

march. Selma's public hospital refused to treat Rev. James Reeb, an Unitarian Universalist minister from Boston, who had to be driven two hours to Birmingham where he died two days later.

Two weeks after Bloody Sunday, Dr. King assured a gathering of organizers, activists and community members that they should not despair because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

On March 25, 1965, having completed the third march to Montgomery, the city that gave birth to the civil rights movement, Dr. King spoke these words on the steps of the Alabama State Capitol:

"I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?"....

"I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth crushed to earth will rise again.

"How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever.

"How long? Not long, because you shall reap what you sow....

"How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."<sup>4</sup>

Osama bin Laden is dead. Jesus Christ is risen! He is the one who redeems! He is the one who is putting the world back together, setting things right. “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Keep your eyes open for the risen Christ in your midst. Keep your ears open to hear what Jesus will say. Keep your heart open to your fellow pilgrims on the road to Emmaus. Jesus will show the way on the road to Emmaus. When he does, open your mouth and ask, “Have you heard the breaking news?” Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://open.salon.com/blog/arthur\\_howe/2009/01/18/the\\_arc\\_of\\_the\\_universe\\_is\\_long\\_but\\_it\\_bends\\_towards\\_justice](http://open.salon.com/blog/arthur_howe/2009/01/18/the_arc_of_the_universe_is_long_but_it_bends_towards_justice)  
1 Peter 1:17-23                      Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 Luke 24:13-35