

*"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."* – Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 6:27-28)

*"Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."* – Martin Luther King, Jr. (Strength to Love, 1963)

I received the news of Osama bin Laden's death with mixed emotions. I found relief in knowing that he was no longer twisting and perverting religion to provoke hatred among humanity. I was relieved to know that he could no longer lead people to address their differences with acts of terrible violence. I took the news of his death as a hopeful sign that things may begin to change for the world and for all who have suffered because of this man's violent actions over the last two decades. In hearing the news, I was relieved and grateful for the soldiers who risked their lives to carry out a dangerous mission by means that limited the threat to innocent civilians in Abbottabad, Pakistan. In many ways, I received this as good news.

That said, his assassination by our government, the hatred implicitly expressed through the rejoicing of so many in this country, and the inescapable reality that nearly one million people have been killed (not to mention the countless wounded and traumatized) as a direct result of our ten-year effort to find/capture/kill Osama bin Laden overwhelm me with sadness. It grieves me that we kill in the name of justice, that we rejoice in another's death, and that we seemingly accept the deaths of hundreds of thousands as a reasonable outcome to this decade of war.

While bin Laden was indeed a purveyor of evil in this world and his death is welcome by the vast majority of humanity, it does nothing to erase the pain and death of these last ten years. It does nothing to bring light to the darkness of what has

been the experience of this country and so many others in this world for so long.

So how are we to feel?

That is a question I have been struggling to answer for myself in recent days. As a follower of Jesus, I know the expectation and desire of God that I love all people...even the enemy. As a follower of Jesus, I am called by the grace of God to forgive and to proclaim the good news of forgiveness for all. As a follower of Jesus, I am called to be a light of life and mercy in a world darkened by the broken realities of hatred and violence. So how am I to feel in the wake of this act of death and (to some degree) vengeance, when it is, in many ways, good news to humanity?

To give voice to and claim an answer to this question is indeed a struggle, and I acknowledge that is deeply personal. While we all share in the experience of this war and this particular enemy, it is perhaps fair to say that we have all been affected differently. I certainly do not presume to understand what this experience has been for each of you, nor will I tell you how you should feel about it. I only ask the question and invite a careful and faithful response.

I will say this, though: while our lives in this world may be very different from one another, and while our experiences, opinions and politics may vary widely, we share something much greater than all of these when we share a faith. When we claim a faith in Jesus, when we claim the grace and forgiveness of the risen Christ, and when we identify as disciples doing our best to live as Jesus has called us to live, we stand as one people with a pretty firm foundation beneath our feet.

So whether we struggle to answer the question of how to respond to the killing of one we fear and despise, or whether we struggle with any number of questions that life in this world will throw in our faces, I encourage you to take a stand as Christ's disciple. If you claim a faith in Jesus,

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know that the love and mercy upon which you stand will carry you through, and give you a voice to speak the love and forgiveness that God so eagerly offers for all. Find that voice within you and share it. God knows this world needs to hear it!

Grace and Peace,  
Peder Johanson