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I have come today to speak to you at a time when words have lost their meaning. It is as though some edge of the world has broken off and can never be mended. We offer you this morning music, the language of the heart; and we offer silence, hoping that in this spaciousness your grief might find a place for expression.

This morning I have for you no political speculation, no sociological analysis, no theological musings on the subject of evil. Nor will I pretend to understand, to explain, what has happened to our country. The sorting out will come later, in due time. Today we come together for mourning.

Like many of you, I woke up Tuesday morning to National Public Radio, woke up to news that I could scarcely believe. Was this some strange kind of joke, some contemporary "War of the Worlds"? As the news continued, I knew we were in the midst of a horror story like unto none we have ever known in this country. I called a friend, for in times like this, we reach out for others. "Are you listening to the news?" I said. "Have you heard what has happened?"

Then fear set in. Are we in a war? Will the violence escalate? I felt vulnerable, as never before. I thought about my children, as many of you must have thought about your children or other kin in faraway places. "Are they safe?" we thought. "Are they frightened?" Some of you had friends or business associates who worked in the World Trade Center. You hoped they were among the lucky ones who escaped.

I dressed and went to the church. We began getting calls, many voices: "Will the church be open?" "Will you be open today?" "I need a place to go. Will you open the church?" We held a prayer vigil on the evening of the attack. More than 100 of you drifted in and out of the quiet of the Salmon Street sanctuary. There was no talk. Just silence, the lighting of candles, and weeping.

Though I am a person who cries easily, I was not one of the ones weeping that evening. In fact, I have shed not a tear. Truthfully, I cannot take in what has happened just yet. The sheer numbers of the injured and the dead defy imagination. And the manner of their death, many vanished with hardly a trace-maybe just a photo or part of a charred letter scattered on the street. My tears will come when they will come. Right now I feel numb, empty, disoriented. Inside is a deep well of sadness.

Church. Why did so many people all over the country flock to places of worship on that fateful day. It is to these sacred spaces that we come to mourn collectively, that we come together in a community of love and faith that holds us when we falter, that reassures us that we are not alone, and that helps us to heal so that we may once again live lives of courage and hope.

It is my practice to pray once a day, just as I arise from sleep. But these days I feel as if I'm praying all the time-at last I "pray without ceasing," as the scripture says, for I feel joined by blood and by spirit to everyone in this country, to every American, and in particular to the

victims of this cruel, barbarous attack. How can we not be deeply touched? How can we not be changed? We cannot help but open our hearts; our presence cannot be but genuine. There is no place to hide. We are one.

Though fear and despair have held us in their grip, something else is pushing its way up just now through the ashes on the streets of New York-it is the sense of humanity that we hold in common. We are there with the people waiting in line, hoping against hope to hear that mother is all right, that a dear husband somehow has escaped; we are in the firehouse as the firefighters mourn their brothers, those who bravely waded into the destruction, perishing as they tried to save others; all of us are there at the window of the building next to the World Trade Center, watching in horror as the plane crashes into the glass and steel, again and again and again. We are reminded of our own losses, the frailty of flesh. We know once again that we are vulnerable, that tomorrow is a hope but never a promise.

There are other images, images that renew our spirits, images that tell another truth, and that is this: though human beings are capable of the most horrendous evil, they are also capable of startling goodness. I see a young nurse whose fiance is missing--she volunteers to care for those who can be saved; the man who worked on one of the lower floors and could have escaped but refused to leave the side of his quadriplegic colleague; the men in the doomed plane in Pennsylvania who, even as they faced certain death, moved to keep others from dying; the e-mail sent by an employee in the World Trade Center, who, just before his life was snuffed out, sent the message, "Thank you for being such a great friend." Let these images stay alive within you, for they encourage us to live in such a way that when death comes for us, we will have proved worthy of the life we have been given.

This vicious and unprecedented terrorist attack was the sacrifice of flesh to ideology. It was a momentary victory. We are making every effort to find and to punish those responsible, and that is as it should be. Hear me now: there is no ideology, no religious persuasion, no political purpose, none whatsoever, that is worth the tiniest scrap of living human flesh.

There is the temptation, of course, to strike back with all our force, and soon, perhaps before we are entirely sure who is the enemy. That is the frustration that we live with just now. I pray that we will not strike down innocent civilians, as our innocent civilians have been so cruelly struck down: accountants, office managers, secretaries, ordinary people living their lives. Immediately there were incidents of harassment and threats of violence toward our Arab-American and our Muslim neighbors. Somebody has to pay, we say. But let it not be those who have done no harm, whose only crime is having dark skin and a religion that is unfamiliar to us.

I wish to leave you with a simple blessing this morning: be kind to yourselves during these hard days; let yourself grieve, remember that your pain is measured by the depth of your love; stay close to your children and let them know they are secure in your care; remember to count as worthy every human being, of whatever race or creed. And dear friends, light a candle sometime, somewhere, in these dark days to remind yourself of the one single thing we know to be true beyond any doubt: hate will never, never triumph in the end. It never has, and it never will. Love will prevail. Love will prevail. So be it. Amen.