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"There is a greater fact, a deeper truth, that our faith has always attested to. Love that will not let us go. May you find, here and there, a moment to rest in that Love." - the Rev. Mary Harrington

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In the last week I have talked with two people, one colleague and one church member, who have been to Ground Zero in New York. When someone experiences something so traumatic and other-worldly, they both want to talk about it and at the same time can barely find words. As a listener, one thing you know for sure is that no matter what they said, you couldn't possibly imagine or understand what it was like.

When I worked as a hospital chaplain, sometimes on call for 36 hours straight, I often found myself mute when a friend asked me how things were going in my job. I didn't know where to start; I was flooded with images of other people's shock, trauma and anguish. This remembering would pull me way inside, to a place that is very, very quiet. So usually I would just say I was fine, and change the subject. It seemed virtually impossible to talk about it.

Even though the World Trade Center was bombed a month ago, there are still rescue workers and chaplains who are searching for and locating body parts and shreds of clothing, and escorting them to the morgue. Doing all that can be done to recover any trace of the human beings who were lost, with dignity and care.

"We used to take three days to plan a single funeral. The lines were straight. You could hear a pin drop. But now you lose things. The lines may not be as straight. The response to commands may not be as crisp." So said Lt. Walter Dreyer, Commander of the New York Fire Department's ceremonial unit, to "The New York Times" last week, about the overwhelming number of funerals being conducted for the fire fighters who went in and never came out. The toll in numbness and exhaustion is inestimable. Underneath all of that is the profound grief not only for those who died but also for one's own inability to keep up the standard of attention and respect for each individual. At some point you just have to surrender to the fact of human limitation.

There is, though, a greater fact, a deeper truth, that our faith has always attested to. What comes through for us when we must, in our humanness, give up the straight line and the crisp salute, or sufficient words to express what we saw, or the capacity to hold one more ounce of worry and sorrow: [it is] the Love that will not let us go.

I've been thinking of a poem by children's author Madeleine L'Engle, who also writes books for adults on matters of the spirit:

The earth will never be the same again,
Rock, water, tree, iron, share this grief
As distant stars participate in pain.

A candle snuffed, a falling star or leaf,
A human death, O this particular loss
Is Heaven-mourned; for if no angel cried,
If this small one was tossed away as dross,
The very galaxies would have lied.
How shall we sing our love's song now
In this strange land where all are born to die?
Each tree and leaf and star show how
The universe is part of this one cry,
That every life is noted and is cherished,
And nothing loved is ever lost or perished.

As we keep sifting through the rubble in New York, as we watch the news and hear about the attacks on Afghani targets, anthrax, and the anti-American demonstrations taking place across the globe; as we struggle to comprehend what is going on still -- even so, when your mind and heart reach the limit of human understanding, don't forget:

There is a Love holding All. May you find, here and there, a moment to rest in that Love.

And come to church on Sundays, on Tuesday and Thursday evenings for the silent vigils -- anytime. So we can be merely human, and held, together.

With blessings on the journey,

Mary