



Second Thought

By Rev. Joanne Thomson

My first thought when I heard that bombs had gone off in Boston was, “Is everyone ok?” And after I knew that our people were safe, my second thought was: “How dare they attack my city.” (David Ortiz expressed this much more eloquently a few days later.)

It isn't that one disaster, whether human-caused or natural, is more important than another. It isn't that some victims are more deserving of help than others. Things like this are *wrong*, no matter where, how, or to whom they happen. It's just *wrong* for human life to be overturned by violence.

But I could also see that it mattered that it was my hometown this time. Those tank-like vehicles were driving the streets of the neighborhood where I'd lived when I was a pastor in Cambridge. That's where the second thought, the “how dare they,” came from. And I have been wondering about this, about what it means for us as individuals to belong to and to identify with something beyond our own selves.

This is a good question for Christians to wrangle with. We have put on Christ. We were baptized into a bigger, broader, deeper story than what belongs to us individually. It's a mystical identity that both transcends and incorporates everything that's part of our humanity--our individuality, our families, race, gender, nationality, all of it. **How is it possible for our identity in Christ to become as real and compelling for us as our families, our jobs, our politics?**

I think that covenant is one way this happens, and by covenant I mean the relationships that we experience in Christian community, relationships between people in which God is also present. I learned about being a Bostonian by being there with important people at important times. My father taking me to my first Patriots game, my mother teaching me how to use the subway. I learned about being a Christian the same way, by being there with important people at important times. The teens with whom I've gone on mission trips, the mentors from whom I learned generosity, the countless others with whom I've shared communion, worship, and, God help us, meetings. Because God is present in and through these relationships, they are not only important, but also sacred, and form us in the likeness of Christ.

In my experience, we in the Wisconsin Conference have been very good at covenant relationships for a long time. I think that these relationships are, in fact, what the Conference means to us. We learn what the Wisconsin Conference is, and what the United Church of Christ

is, from the people we come to know and work alongside. Without those people, there's just no way to learn what we need to know about what it means to identify with a purpose beyond our own, with God's purpose.

Things are changing around here, and some more of the people who have carried the relationships that have helped to define who we are will be leaving soon. But we know how to be there for and with each other. We do that very well. And if there's anything I hope for in the months ahead, it's that we will all keep showing up. Because in the covenant, there is no other way to figure out what it is that God wants us to do next, except together.