

Ways of remembering

From the Editors in the [October 4, 2011](#) issue

It's been said there are two kinds of suffering: one kind leads to more suffering, the other kind puts an end to it. The attacks of 9/11 were an instance of the first kind of suffering, for they quickly led to more suffering. They led, specifically, to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, in which hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians have been killed, including over 5,500 U.S. troops.

Just as there are two kinds of suffering, there are two kinds of remembering. One kind remembers wounds in a way that feeds the desire to inflict wounds on others. The other kind remembers in order to seek healing and a life beyond the suffering and the violence. Likely both kinds of remembering occurred during the recent ten-year anniversary of 9/11.

What if, after 9/11, the U.S. had engaged in dialogue about what it would take to make sure that its response to those evil deeds would further the cause of peace and reduce suffering? What if, instead of invading Afghanistan and Iraq, national leaders had worked with international partners to find the perpetrators of the crime and to bring them to justice? What if the U.S. had reached out to Muslims? What if 9/11 had made solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a national priority? What if all churches had built relationships with mosques, and what if Christians and Muslims had worked on community projects together?

The nation was traumatized by the horrible deeds of 9/11. Those who work with trauma victims know that when the source of the trauma is violence, healing lies in breaking the cycle of violence and building bridges of peace between the parties that have been at enmity. This work involves risk, of course. But one thing 9/11 should have taught us is that the world can never be made risk-free and totally safe.

The central symbol of the Christian faith, the cross, is a symbol of suffering and violence. It embodies the second kind of suffering, for it stands for an act of sacrifice intended to put an end to sacrifice. Jesus endured an act of violence for the purpose of putting an end to violence.

And remembering the cross is, for Christians, an instance of the second kind of remembering. Christians gather in remembrance of the cross not to seek revenge or to fuel a desire for violence, but to become part of Jesus' own self-sacrificing ministry of peacemaking and reconciliation. Reclaiming that vocation is the church's way of remembering 9/11.