

SEPTEMBER 11 MEMORIAL SERVICE

Heroes Garden

September 9, 2005

Message and Benediction

Ken Durham, Minister, University Church of Christ

A Place Called Remember

The wonderful writer Frederick Buechner has written of a place where we can go when we need to lay hold of things that should not be forgotten. He names it "*A Room Called Remember.*"

Some memories, he says, come to us unbidden and unexpectedly.

But some memories we choose to reclaim ... intentionally and purposefully ... because they are important.

Some memories are sweet and reassuring ... and they warm us.

Some are hard and heartbreaking ... and they warn us, or humble us, or stir us from complacency and trivia, or all the above.

This place, you might say, is A Place Called Remember. Nancy and I have come here often, usually in the early evening. Sometimes we bring our out-of-town family members or guests. Sometimes we come alone. Often we meet other families here, enjoying the same beauty and serenity we love about this place.

But this beauty and serenity belies the hard and heartbreaking memories this place venerates ... and that we come today to reclaim, intentionally and purposefully.

We remember that September 11 four years ago when we woke on a Tuesday morning to the surreal images from out of New York City.

We remember trying to make sense of it all, and failing.

We remember the surfacing of the stories of the heroes and heroines of 9-11, in the air and at Ground Zero.

We remember the words of Jesus: "*There is no greater love than this—that one lay down his life for his friends.*" (John 15:13)

We think of Tom Burnett.

One year later—September 11, 2002—we gathered at 5:30 a.m. in a crowded Stauffer Chapel. We gathered—in the darkness of that early morning hour—to remember. We rang a bell four times during that service to mark moments of terrible loss.

At 5:45 a.m. PST (8:45 Eastern), when the first plane hit the first World Trade Tower. Steve Kliest, a captain of the Santa Barbara Fire Department rang the bell. And we prayed.

At 6:03 a.m., when a second plane struck the second World Trade Tower, the bell was rung again, this time by Henry Aguilar, an L.A. County Sheriff's deputy. And we prayed.

At 6:37 a.m., when the Pentagon was struck by a third plane, the bell was rung again by Jack White, Pepperdine law student and captain in the U.S. Army Reserve. And we prayed.

When we closed the service at 6:45 a.m., the bell was rung again one last time, to commemorate the crash later in the day of the fourth plane in a field in Somerset County, PA. It was rung by Ted Leenerts, retired Lt. Commander in the Naval Reserves, and a chaplain present at Ground Zero in the days following 9-11. And we prayed. And we were dismissed.

We gathered in darkness. We departed in the emerging light of a new day.

Now it is almost four years since 9-11, and we are gathered once more ... to remember ... lest we forget.

Even as we find ourselves as a nation brought to our knees again, this time by Hurricane Katrina ... we resolve to remember ...

that our sorrows will not be wasted,
but that they will only increase our commitment and
determination—

to draw closer to one another,
to love our neighbor,
and perhaps, even, our enemy,
to forgive and to rebuild and to renew.

But is that possible? And is it possible that Jesus really meant it ...?

when he said, turn the other cheek,
forgive those who have sinned against us,
pray for those who war against us?

Was he misquoted? Was that just so much antiquated Hebrew hyperbole?

Or is that God's own holy truth?

Is God's way the only way ...

that centuries-old cycles of retribution will be broken,
that hate can be rooted out and sanity can be restored,
that the world can be fundamentally changed?

We gather in that hope today.

In this Place Called Remember ...

Let us resolve that we will not be mastered by the hate and
the bitterness and the vengefulness,
but that we will be mastered by Divine Love.

Let us remember, and be stirred from our complacency,
stirred by our awful human capacity to do great evil,
stirred by our heroic human capacity to do great good,
stirred by our conviction that—
hate is powerful, but sacrificial love is more so
evil is strong, but mercy is stronger
death may at times seem to have the upper
hand, but resurrection will have the last word.

I want to close with the words of a contemporary praise song that our
student group Won By One sang at our first remembrance service:

*There is a candle in every soul
Some brightly burning, some dark and cold
There is a Spirit who brings a fire
Ignites his candle and makes his home.*

*Carry your candle, run to the darkness
Seek out the hopeless, confused and torn
Hold out your candle for all to see it.
Take your candle and go light your world.*

Benediction

Father, we ask you to continue to heal the wounds of our
nation, and that you would continue to comfort and sustain the
families who still suffer from the losses incurred four years ago.

Forgive us, Father, when we give in to hatred, when we nurse
our grievances. Make us ministers of reconciliation. Make us
instruments not of hate but of your peace. Make us builders not
destroyers ... healers, not avengers.

We give thanks for the shining spirit of courage and self-giving
love that emerged from the darkness of 9-11. With such models of
heroism before us, may we make a renewed commitment to work for
mercy and kindness for peoples all over the world, especially for our
neighbors along the Gulf Coast and across the Southeast. Increase
and extend our compassion for all those everywhere who are the
victims of misfortune, or violence, or injustice.

Help us to identify for ourselves those sources of life and light that cannot be shaken by any terror, any terrorist. May we find in you, Lord, an unshakable place to stand, and the courage to build and live lives of courage and conviction.

Keep our hearts tender, Father, and our minds alert, to the human need around us. May we each seek out and find the works of love that we can do.

Through Christ. Amen.