

September 11th Memorial Service
Heroes Garden
September 9, 2005

Welcome and Invocation
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Remembering September 11

I would like to welcome you all here to this beautiful place of reflection, the Heroes Garden. It is quite fitting that we would be here as we gather today to remember and honor the lives of the 2,986 innocent Americans who lost their lives in the brutal terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001. In remembering these victims, we may recall the 343 firefighters and paramedics who gave their lives to save others, especially as we look around and see members of our own fire department standing beside us. We may also remember the 3051 children who lost a parent and reflect for a moment on our own children or younger siblings. Or perhaps we will remember the heroic passengers of United flight 93 who decided to stand up and fight at the cost of their own lives to prevent the murder of further civilians. One of these heroes was a fellow Pepperdine alum, Tom Burnett, for whom this garden is dedicated.

There are so many things to remember today. For all of us, the memory of where we were when we first learned of the tragedy stands clear in our minds. The horror of watching our greatest buildings fall in burning balls of flame and rubble; the sickening recognition that we as a nation are not invulnerable; the images of victims falling to their deaths on the national news as we recoil in anger and disgust; the haunting question, “Why?” for which we were given no answer.

Today we gather to remember all these things, and yet, perhaps this gathering is a bit superfluous as we have never forgotten. The world changed on that sunny Tuesday morning of September 11, four years ago and it has never been the same again. We are a generation and a people defined by this single event. I know my own education and career plans were drastically altered in response to 9-11 as I found it necessary to search for a better understanding of a world that could produce such destruction and what I could do to mitigate this hate. And I am not alone.

As Americans, we are a tenacious people that are made stronger through adversity and more united through tragedy. In the weeks and months following the September 11 attacks, the nation rallied together in patriotism and brotherly love to such a magnitude that it shattered all hopes that the terrorists harbored of defeating or dividing us. America was victorious.

Recently, America has been struck by another great tragedy, this time suffering the effects of a natural disaster known as Hurricane Katrina. At such a time, we are filled

with much of the same emotion and left with similar questions as we were following the terrorist attacks of September 11. In fact, in reading some of the poems, thoughts, and stories of the victims of 9-11, I came upon a short narrative that I feel applies to our response as Americans to Hurricane Katrina, just as it did to 9-11. It reads:

I saw a terrible tragedy and yelled at God, "How could you let such a thing happen? Why didn't you do something"

A little while later, God's answer came: 'I did do something. I made you.'"

In closing, I would like to leave you with the words of the Greek historian Thucydides in his account of Pericles' Funeral Oration to fallen heroes, like those heroes of 9-11 who we honor here today.

"For famous men have the whole earth as their memorial; it is not only the inscriptions on their graves in their own country that mark them out; no, in foreign lands also, not in any visible form but in people's hearts, their memory abides and grows. It is for you to try to be like them."

Please bow your heads and join me in prayer:

Dear Lord, today we gather under your omnipotent presence and loving grace as we remember the lives that were lost only four years ago. While we feel great anguish to see so much destruction and experience so much pain, you give us comfort as we know that you are in control. Although the world can seem so broken and so full of evil, we can be assured that in you there is justice, and there is peace, and there is hope. Even amongst such incomprehensible suffering and trauma, we know that you were there, right beside each of your children as they departed this world and came to return to You.

Lord, we pray for a special blessing on this day of remembrance and ask that you be with those wives, those husbands, those parents, and those children who lost someone so dear to them and for whom today represents a gaping wound that seems impossible to heal.

Likewise Father, we humbly pray that you give your comfort and strength to the thousands who have lost everything in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Fill our nation and our world with the love and strength that can overcome any tragedy. Thank you Lord for the one gift that can truly bring redemption to our broken world, your Son, Jesus Christ.

In Christ's Name We Pray,

Amen