

All Saints' Sunday (November 6, 2011)

engage!

“Engage the Future”

Text: [1 John 3:1-3](#), [Revelation 7:1-17](#)

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If you've been to Washington, you've probably visited the Viet Nam Memorial. [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Mv-4Y0QIVk&feature=related>] You've followed the sidewalk that leads down into the black gash in the earth which is all too symbolic of the dark gash that the war in Viet Nam became in our nation's history.

It's strangely quiet there. Maybe it's the simplicity of the design that silences people who walk along the way...the polished, black granite engraved with all those names, 58,261 of them, the names of ordinary people with no regard for rank, race or station in life; just names of those who might have otherwise been forgotten. They appear in the order of their deaths, one by one, taking us deeper and deeper into the “valley of the shadow of death.”

And then, as the death counts begin to decline and the war moves toward its end, we come back out of the darkness into the light, but no one is every quite the same for having made the journey.

There had never been a memorial quite like it. The designer is a Chinese American artist named Maya Lin. Born in Ohio of immigrant parents, she was a 21-year-old undergrad at Yale when her design won the commission out of 1,441 other submissions. She believes that if it had not been a “blind” competition, she probably would not have been chosen simply because of her name. There were, in fact, politicians who questioned the selection of a Chinese American.

The wall was unusual, even controversial at the time, but it has become the model for other memorials that have followed. Here's the latest. It's the 911 Memorial in New York City.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OIkvRfFZW9I>

There are two gigantic pools with water falls on the footprints of the twin Towers. Along the side are the names; the names of 2,983 men, women and children who died in the attacks in 2001 and 1993.

Both memorials include the names, but there are significant differences. Whereas the names on the Viet Nam wall are listed chronologically, the names at the 911 Memorial are grouped by

relationships: firefighters with firefighters, coworkers with coworkers, friends and family members together.

Harry Ramos met Victor Wald in the stairwell of the North Tower. When Victor could go no further, Harry stopped and stayed with him. Their names are together beside the waterfall.

You might have noticed that when you are reading the names on the Viet Nam Memorial, you see yourself reflected in the polished granite. You could say that in reading the names we see ourselves. You could say that by remembering who they were, we are reminded of who we are.

The names on the 911 Memorial are stencil-cut in the bronze parapets, so that you actually look through the names to the waterfall below. It's as if you look beyond the name to something beyond their deaths. At night, the light shines up through the names. You could say that by looking through their names we catch a glimpse of something beyond their deaths. Through their names, we catch a glimpse of the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness has never been able to put it out.

So, we've remembered names here today – the names of people we have known and loved; the names of people who introduced us to Jesus Christ and helped shape our lives into his likeness. Remembering their names reminds us of who we are, of who we are called to be, and of who, by the power of God's love, we can yet become.

Remembering those names, we can see something beyond their deaths. We catch a glimpse of God's future and something of the light and life of Christ shines through them.

Maybe John had an experience like that when he caught a glimpse of Heaven in the book of Revelation.

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white and they cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'

John could see the fulfillment of God's saving work in this world. He could see what this world will be like when God's kingdom comes and God's will is done on earth as it is done in heaven.

No more hunger and thirst,
No more scorching heat,

No more darkness,
No more suffering, sorrow and tears,
He could see that day when the Lamb, the one who gave his life for us,
will be their Shepherd, will guide them to springs of the water of life, and
will wipe every tear from their eyes.

John could see it, and seeing it he could see his life and our lives
in a whole new way.

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are...Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. (I John 3:1-2)

Seeing the light of Christ in the lives of those who have gone before us changes the way we see ourselves. Right here, right now, we are given a new identity as the children of God. Right here, right now, as children of God, we are called to live in ways that bear witness how God's intends for the future to be. Right now, we are children of God through whose lives the light of Christ shines through.

Now, let's bring all of this Heavenly stuff back to earth and back to where we are today. The fact is that we get to choose how people will remember our names.

We've been thinking together this fall about how we engage in the new life, the abundant life, the eternal life that Christ came to bring.

We engage in that life as we practice the time-tested spiritual disciplines that shape us into the likeness of Christ.

We engage in that life as we discover our spiritual gifts and release those gifts in service to the world.

We engage in that life as we practice the spiritual discipline of financial generosity.

We engage that life in community with others as we make God's love a tangible reality in this world.

Here and now, we engage in the work of God that shapes the future. That's what these commitment cards are all about. They are the practical, down-to-earth steps we are willing to take to engage in God's future. These are the practices by which we prepare for Heaven.

So, here's the question. How will people remember our names? Some day your name and mine will be called on this list. None of us are getting out of here alive. How will they remember us? Will they remember us as men and women in whose lives they saw the light of Christ? What steps do we need to take, what commitments do we need

to make, so that one day someone will remember us among the saints?
How will they remember your name?