



ST BART'S

A Sermon by
The Right Reverend Dean E. Wolfe, *Rector*

The 16th Anniversary of 9/11 An Occasion for Remembrance and Reflection

Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, September 11th, 2017

Almost anyone who was in New York City on September 11th, 2001, begins their story by saying, "It was a beautiful day."

It was a beautiful day. Children headed for school. Men and women making their way to work. A beautiful, ordinary, wonderful day, a day very much like this one.

In his most famous address, President Abraham Lincoln wrote these immortal words:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war.

President Lincoln traveled to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on November 18th, 1863, to do a small but crucial task. He went to speak at a service consecrating the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg, where the Union had experienced catastrophic casualties in a decisive battle with the Confederacy. There were several other speakers that day, including Edwin Everett, who offered a two-hour oration as the main event. Lincoln's address was the shortest of them all.

We are here today because 16 years ago a group of brave public servants gave their lives when they responded to the call to the World Trade Center. That day nearly 3000 people lost their lives, including firefighters and paramedics, Port Authority police officers, and New York Police officers. More than 1600 people lost a spouse or a partner. More than 3000 children lost a parent.

We, the living, are gathered on this day, and in this sacred space, to remember and to honor those who have died. Lincoln wrote:

We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.

And we cannot make any holier the memories of those who have died, because their actions, their selfless dedication, have already done so,

Jesus once said, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." And, if there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends, then what do we call it when people lay down their lives for people they don't even know? What do we call it when men and women risk their precious

lives to save the lives of others? It is called duty and courage and honor, and it is duty of a sort so rare and so precious, that it is regarded as sacred in our society. It is this sense of duty and honor upon which we all depend, and 9/11 is a vivid reminder that, on occasion, we demand from those who serve what Lincoln called, “the last full measure of devotion.”

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Nothing, neither death, nor life, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Christians believe it is the “love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” which will restore us, upon our death, and resurrect us to a new life in the holy presence of the eternal God. But words like these can sound hollow to those who have lost so much. The sacrifice made by each person we remember is a vivid testament that the God who created us out of love does not stop loving us when we die. And we can also trust that the God who created each of these extraordinary people who have died will not allow us to be separated from them in death forever.

You know, I can’t help but wonder what these good men would say about all of this if they could address us now, their family, their friends, and colleagues. Of course, I cannot, and perhaps should not, presume to say. But I can’t help but hear them tell us, “Pay attention. Enjoy the time you’ve been given on this earth. Be truly devoted to your friends and your family. Don’t get distracted by the little things. Live each day you have been given fully. Make room for God in your life and don’t take one single moment of your beautiful, sacred life for granted, because you never know—none of us knows—how much time we will have to enjoy it.”

Lincoln continued:

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion...

Tom Brokaw, in his book titled *The Greatest Generation*, talks about our parents’ generation: a generation who survived the Great Depression, two World Wars, and did the hard work necessary to establish equal rights among people of different races. Who will pick up the torch held by these sturdy forefathers and mothers? Whose light will burn as brightly in our generation?

Ours is a generation more worried about the pressures of today than an eternal tomorrow. Ours is a generation more comfortable with e-mail than with prayer, more familiar with worry than worship. The men and women we remember and honor this day offer an example from their generation which we can be proud of. Parents can tell their children to pay attention to these examples, for they are worthy of emulation.

President Lincoln concluded his remarks with these words, “...we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

What can be said to a mother or father who has lost their precious son? What can be said to children who have lost a father or a grandfather? What can be said to the woman who has lost her beloved husband, or to the colleague who has lost his best friend?

“He did his duty” will not be enough for them. I believe God speaks the words, if we have ears to hear and hearts able to listen, and he reminds us that those who have fallen have not fallen in vain. Because God speaks through all creation, through every life, through every thought, through every action, in every moment and, in all of it, God keeps repeating,

“I am the resurrection and the Life: He that believes in me, though he were dead yet shall he live, and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”

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Amen.

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