

United by hope: 9/11: Ten years later

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Several members of my Manhattan congregation are involved in the National 9/11 Memorial project at Ground Zero. One is a subcontractor who has worked on the memorial's concrete foundations, and he took me on a tour of the uncompleted memorial last spring. When it opens on the tenth anniversary of the attack, visitors will find it to be Olympian in scale: two pools covering an acre each—roughly the footprint of the twin towers—into which four-sided waterfalls cascade 30 feet, with the museum wedged between the pools; a forest of trees, including the lone survivor tree; and 2,983 names etched in stone.

Another church member working on the memorial came through the greeting line after church not long after my tour and gave me a rubber wristband that reads "9/11 Memorial—United by Hope." I have been wearing it, and plan to do so till after church on Sunday, September 11. I think the three words on my bracelet will serve well to direct how we shape worship that day: *memorial, united, hope*.

Memorials help us remember, of course. They help us remember lives cut short and acts of extraordinary courage. Water falling inward cannot but call to mind collapsing buildings and tears. At church we'll set our remembering in the context of the Great Prayer of Thanks giving. We may toll the steeple bell. I'll avoid the vocabularies of both victimhood and martyrdom. The former confers too small a status on those who died; the latter carries overtones of both religious conflict and intentionality. Heroic language does fit, however, especially in remembering the 400 first responders who gave their lives. They had choices to make, and they chose bravely.

Human beings are united by a great many things, many of them perverse. People are united by race and language, sect and geography; too often they are united by hatred and anger. To be united by hope would be exceptional. The 9/11 memorial seeks to recall the spirit of exceptional unity in the nation and world in the days just

after 9/11—not wistfully, but in a way that dares to hope that such a spirit is ever a possibility. Our Sunday morning service that day will bear witness to what a member who serves on the memorial staff calls "our collective capacity to come together."

Water, especially but not uniquely for Christians, bespeaks hope. Like God, it washes clean and refreshes. I will aim for hope, even more than remembering and unity, to be the governing word for our service this September 11. Brick Church will have a 9/11 fragment on display in our narthex that day, on loan from a museum downtown. It's a grim piece of twisted I-beam, oddly mounted on a pedestal as if it were art. Like many of these memorial fragments, it has "SAVE" spray painted on it, a message to salvage crews that carries deeper meaning than any construction worker intended.