

Epworth Chapel on the Green
October 30, 2016
All Saints Sunday
Rev. Brook Thelander

Nehemiah 9:7-14
Psalm 149
Ephesians 1:15-23
Luke 6:20-26

When Connie and I served a church in Illinois, Connie had a dear friend in that church named Lisa. Lisa and her husband, Steve, reached out to us during Andrew's battle with Leukemia. During long stretches of time when Andrew was hospitalized more than two hours away in Indianapolis, Lisa and Steve took Davis home with them and cared for him like he was their own.

Steve had a younger brother who had been killed in the Vietnam War. In our little town of 700 people, a city park bore his name, but that's all we knew of him.

Shortly after we moved here to Boise, we learned that a traveling version of the Vietnam Memorial was coming to our city. When it came to Kathryn Albertson Park, Connie and I drove down to see it in person.

I was not prepared for what I saw. There, stretching as far as my eye could see, on a granite backdrop, was name after name after name. A huge, long list of names.

At one section of the list I saw a lady kneel down and gently kiss one of the names.

At several places there were flowers placed below names on the list.

We walked a little further, and I saw a young mother holding a little child in her arms. She gently took the child's finger, and placed it on a name.

Then Connie and I reached a place where we stopped, and looked more intently at the list. And there, in front of us, was the name we were searching for. The name of Steve's brother – David Judy. I reached up and touched the name with my hand. In that moment, a voice whispered inside my head: *This is not a list of names . Do not call it a list.*

I remember more than twenty years ago when Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* made its way into theaters. The film won seven academy awards and three Golden Globes, earning more than \$320 million at the box office. It tells the story of Oskar Schindler, a Czechoslovakian businessman who saved the lives of at least 1,100 mostly Polish-Jewish refugees during the Holocaust by employing them in his factories.

In 2007, the American Film Institute ranked the film 8th on its list of the Best 100 Films of all time. The Library of Congress selected it for preservation in the *National Film Registry* in 2004.

I remember that it took me more than five years after its release before I could watch the film. In one of the last scenes, Ben Kingsley stands opposite Liam Neeson and quotes from the Talmud: “He who saves one life saves the world entire.”

Neeson responds: “I could have saved more. I could have done more.”

The film ends with many of the Schindler survivors walking in procession to lay stones on Schindler’s tombstone. As they do, their names are listed on the screen. But one thing is certain: *that is not just a list*. Whatever you do, don’t call it a list.

And here we are today, on this special day of the year. A day when, in some ways, *a list* is the centerpiece of our gathering. A large assortment of names, many of whom did not know the others, and many whom we ourselves did not know. Just a page full of names. *A list*.

To be sure, there *are* a few names that I recognize. Del Beukelman was one of the first people I met when I came to Boise to interview to be your pastor. We “hit it off” immediately, and Del became a dear and trusted friend.

Del’s wife, Donna, opened my eyes to a whole new world when she and Lois Lindbloom got me started with watercolors.

Phyllis Barker showed up one day here at Epworth with her husband, Glenn, because she sensed that the Spirit was drawing them to this place. She became a wonderful friend to all of us.

J.M. Neil arrived at Epworth at Stan's invitation, and found a home here for his soul. He was a great blessing to this congregation.

Years ago a woman showed up one day at Epworth. Her name was Ruth Holmes. She was originally from England, and had drifted away from her Anglican roots. Now, later in life, she had cancer, and was searching for a way to put her life back together again. In the months she was with us, she made peace with God, and with herself.

In a similar way, a man by the name of Robert Mathie arrived at Epworth one day with his wife, Sharon. Not long after coming to us, Robert was diagnosed with stage four kidney cancer. I walked with him down his long, painful road of treatment, and eventually down into the valley of the shadow of his death.

Names in a worship folder. A lot of names. Names of people many of whom you never met. Names of people many of whom never met each other. But of this I am certain: *This is not a list. For the love of God, whatever you do, do NOT call this a list.*

This is not a list. This is the church, dressed in white, gathered around the throne, saying: "Worthy is the Lamb!" This is the group of those who ran their

race, who persevered through trial and heartache, and who *finished*. This is the group who joins their voices with ours as we enter into the heavenly worship.

As you come to the Table this morning, the bread and the wine are promises that *your* place in that assembly awaits you. So come with faith. Receive the grace he offers you. Then let that grace strengthen and empower you to stay in the race, and to finish strong.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.