

The purpose of days of memorials, the purpose of remembering, is not to hold onto the pain and anguish we once felt. The purpose is to affirm with every fiber of our being that death is not an end, but a pathway leading onward.

Lucien Price says:

Death is a daily event. Your life, my life, anybody's, is a succession of deaths and resurrections. These deaths-in-life are a perishing out of smaller worlds and a being reborn into larger. Another name for them is growth--growth, which is life, and often as painful as death, yet, "Except a seed fall into the ground and die, it cannot bring forth fruit."

Not until we let go our tense, rigid mortal grasp of the beloved object is the secret revealed: that another Paradise lies just outside the Garden. These, life's dress rehearsals for death, are a testing of the soul's mettle, of its willingness to die out of the life that was--beautiful, rich, and useful though it may have been--and to be born into another, of molten gold from which the soul may smith what masterpieces it will.

(Lucien Price, *Litany for All Souls*)

Walt Whitman uses these words:

Away O soul! hoist instantly the anchor!
Cut the hawsers--haul out--shake out every sail!
Sail forth--steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless, O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.
O my brave soul!
O farther, farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe? are they not all the seas of God?
O farther, farther, farther sail!

(Walt Whitman, *Passage to India*)

Loss tempers our lives, it gives meaning and sweetness to our moments of love. Our very mortality and the transience of all we hold dear, makes every moment precious and all love priceless. Dorothy Monroe says:

Death is not too high a price to pay for having lived.
Mountains never die, nor do the rocks or endless sky.
Through countless centuries of time, they stay eternal, deathless.
Yet they never live!
If choice there were, I would not hesitate to choose mortality.
Whatever Fate demanded in return for life I'd give,
for, never to have seen the fertile plains
nor heard the winds
nor felt the warm sun on sands beside the salty sea,
nor touched the hands of those I love--
without these, all the gains of timelessness

would not be worth one day of living and loving;
come what may.

(Dorothy Monroe, *The Cost*)

There are those who have died in the service of their country, their young, brave lives sacrificed for vision they believed noble and good, for a homeland they loved, to protect families and even those they have never met. These brave women and men appeal to us from the grave, as Archibald MacLeish so fluently writes:

The young dead soldiers do not speak.

Nevertheless they are heard in the still houses: who has not heard them?

They have a silence that speaks for them at night and when the clock counts. They say: We were young. We have died. Remember us.

They say: We have done what we could, but until it is finished it is not done.

They say: We have given our lives, but until it is finished no one can know what our lives gave.

They say: our deaths are not ours; they are yours; they will mean what you make them.

They say, whether our lives and our deaths were for peace and a new hope or for nothing we cannot say; it is you who must say this.

They say: We leave you our deaths. Give them their meaning. We were young, they say. We have died. Remember us.

There are losses that seem unbearable: a child taken for any reason from our embrace, young parents leaving behind children barely able to understand their loneliness, a spouse with whom we shared the daily tapestry of life for 30 years, or 40, or 60...and young women and men who have sacrificed their lives on the altar of war, sent to die because we cannot control our violence. Ralph Chaplin speaks:

Mourn not the dead that in the cool earth lie--

Dust unto dust--

The calm, sweet earth that mothers all who die--

As all men must;

 Mourn not your captive comrades who must dwell--

 Too strong to strive--

 Each in his steel-bound coffin of a cell,

 Buried alive;

But rather mourn the apathetic throng--

The cowed and meek--

Who see the world's great anguish and its wrong

And dare not speak!

(Ralph Chaplin)

And what do we hope for ourselves? As we face the inevitable end of the journey we began at birth, what do we hope above all? For some, Rabindranath Tagore speaks:

On the day when death will knock at the door of [my] life, what will I offer him?
...I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life--I will never let him go with empty hands. All the sweet vintage of my autumn days and summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life, will I place before him at the close of my days.

(Tagore, *Fruit-Gathering*, No. 40)

For some, the words of Thomas Wolfe describe the wish:

Something has spoken to me in the night,
Burning the tapers of the waning year;
Something has spoken in the night,
And told me that I shall shine, I know not where.
Saying, "To lose the earth you know, for greater knowing;
To lose the life you have, for greater life;
To leave the friends you loved; for greater loving;
To find a land more kind than home, more large than earth--"

(Thomas Wolfe, *Toward Which*)

For others, S. Hall Young tells our deepest wish:

Let me die, working.
Still tackling plans unfinished, tasks undone!
Clean to its end, swift may my race be run.
No laggard steps, no faltering, no shirking;
Let me die, working!

Let me die, thinking.
Let me fare forth still with an open mind,
Fresh secrets to unfold, new truths to find,
My soul undimmed, alert, no questions blinking;
Let me die, thinking!

Let me die, giving.
The substance of life for life's enriching;
Time, things, and self on heaven converging,
No selfish thought, loving, redeeming, living;
Let me die, giving!

(S. Hall Young, *Into the Sunset*)

But as the great adventure of life continues to unwind before us, we are faced again and again with deaths and resurrections. We can stand in the darkness or we can turn to the light. And as we enter the dark side of life, we can fight all change or we can welcome the transformation. Katherine Mansfield writes these wise words:

There is a limit to human suffering. When one thinks: "Now I have touched the bottom of the sea--now I can go no deeper," one must go deeper....[But] suffering can be overcome....What must one do? One must *submit*. Do not resist. Take it. Be overwhelmed.

Accept it fully. Make it *part of life*. Everything in life that we really accept undergoes a change. So suffering must become love.

(Katherine Mansfield, *The Journal*)

And then the moment comes to be at peace: to let the memories be warm and distant, to let the dead move on to their new adventure--not holding them back, not tying them here for our convenience and our need.

Gather the stars if you wish it so.
Gather the songs and keep them.
Gather the faces of women.
Gather for keeping years and years.
And then...

Loosen your hands, let go and say good-bye.

Let the stars go.

Let the faces and years go.

Loosen your hands and say good-bye.

(Carl Sandburg, *Stars, Songs, Faces*)

And so we come to the time of remembering, of gathering the memories and weaving them into the tapestry of our lives. In biblical tradition, those things of greatest meaning and importance were actually written and then held close to the heart or before the eyes.

During the Litany of Remembrance, there will be a number of opportunities to remember the names of those who have gone before. At the time of naming, you are invited to go to one of the many locations in the sanctuary where there are bowls of water and small white stones. As a way of remembering the influence of the lives that have touched us, during the several "Times for Naming" that you see written in your orders of worship, simply go to one of the bowls and drop a stone in the water and speak the name of the one you are memorializing. You may go up as many times as you wish. And you may go up and drop a stone for someone who is still alive and yet whom you want to remember.

Following the service, I ask you to hold these names close to you for the next week. Keep these names close to your heart, so that you may remember them and the shaping they have done in your own lives.

The Litany of Remembrance

Leader: We honor all those who are parents to humanity: those who fashion bone of their own bone and flesh of their own flesh, and those as well who dry the tears from small faces, those who stand as bulwarks against the darkness, those who pass on the cherished traditions of past generations, those who listen to the visions of future generations.

Response: We remember all those who were parents of our bodies and of our minds and of our spirits and we offer their names here.

(TIME FOR NAMING)

Leader: We honor all those who are teachers and mentors: those who hear our questions and help us find answers, those whose wisdom awakens a yearning for knowledge and wisdom within us, those who willingly allow themselves to be used as role models and who gently refuse to be kept on pedestals, those whose very being is a lesson in maturity.

Response: We remember all those who taught us that growth is life and we offer their names here.

(TIME FOR NAMING)

Leader: We honor all those who heal the brokenness of humanity: those who mourn with us but will not allow sorrow to be the final word, those who acknowledge our pain without acknowledging its power over us, those who will not allow anger or pride to separate them from another soul, those who (without fear) name our prejudices and biases so that we can no longer hide behind our blindness, our deafness.

Response: We remember all those who told us to pick up our bed and walk, those who called us from alienation to wholeness and we offer their names here.

(TIME FOR NAMING)

Leader: We honor the Clowns of God, the joy bringers: those who leave smiles behind them, those who lift hearts, those who teach us to see ourselves in perspective, those who are not afraid to laugh at themselves, those without pretension, those who find radiance and delight in the ordinary, those who relish life in all its simplicity.

Response: We remember all those whose jokes are never cruel, whose laughter is never unkind, whose pleasure is always shared and we offer their names here.

(TIME FOR NAMING)

Leader: We honor all those who are artists in creation: those in whose hands wood and pottery, paint and metal become objects of beauty, those by whose hands string and pipe are made to sing, those whose special sight brings perspective to our dreams, whose words challenge our finitude.

Response: We remember all those who have transformed the mundane and the plain into the elegant and graceful and we offer their names here.

(TIME FOR NAMING)

Leader: We honor the peacemakers: those who sacrificed their lives so that others might live in peace, those who died in war and those who died in resistance to war, those who built justice and equity by refusing to turn people into stereotypes, those who would not allow their own wealth to be the product of another's poverty.

Response: We remember those of gentle speech, of firm beliefs, of true integrity whose non-violence is the power of good and we offer their names here.

(TIME FOR NAMING)

Leader: We dedicate ourselves to take up their task and to carry the light forward, passing it in our turn to future generations.

Response: We dedicate ourselves to be parents to the orphaned, making of this earth a home for the homeless where all people are supported in their growing.

Leader: We dedicate ourselves to being teachers of young and old, seekers of knowledge, openers of closed doors, welcomers of thoughts and ideas that challenge prejudice.

Response: We dedicate ourselves to making of creation a place of health and wholeness, a place where all are free to become holy and whole.

Leader: We dedicate ourselves to laughter and humility, to bringing joy to all creatures, to strengthening the broken-hearted.

Response: We dedicate ourselves to being creators of beauty, makers of art and music, planters of gardens, dancers of dances.

Leader: We dedicate ourselves to standing against injustice and suffering, even to the ultimate cost of our own lives offered so that injustice and suffering may no longer have a place in creation.

All: We dedicate ourselves to being people of faith, feeders of souls and spirits, compassionate, pure and wise: incarnations of God's love and image in the world.

PRAYER:

Almighty God who never forgets, O Holy Memory in whose loving thoughts rest all our past and all our present, teach us to cherish our moments with the same care you give to holding your whole creation. Help us to be grateful for our fellow creature, Time, on whose stream we float so gently. Sharpen our memories so that we never forget that each moment is a shining and complete and special thing: totally unique, unlike any moment we have known before, never to come again in quite the same way.

Help us to feel our lives as part of the breathing of the universe in which we exist now and will always exist. Teach us to hold our lives and memories in trust and to use them wisely as part of the wide and glorious fabric of creation.

And do remember us, O Lord, even when we do not remember you. Amen.