

Order of Service
Remembering the Beloved
Sunday, November 2, 2008



Call to Worship and Chalice Lighting

We light our chalice for hope,
That our lives and our children's lives
And the lives of all those we love,
May be blessed by beauty,
Graced with goodness,
And renewed by inspiration.
Let us worship again together.

Meditation and Prayer

We find ourselves this morning
At the edge of seasons,
When the fullness of the harvest finally
Gives way to the fallow field.
We find ourselves in a time of financial uncertainty,
When the value of our resources is waning
And the strength of our savings has diminished.
We find ourselves at the edge of our seats,
Wondering who will prevail in the leadership of our
nation.

Much will be determined by the will of the people

In the general election on Tuesday.
It is a time of both hope and trepidation.

We are divided now as a people,
And the passions of the political contest
Have put brother against brother in civil alienation
More intense than usually accompanies an election
year.

We pray that we can come together as a people
To find common purpose,
To address the needs of these uncertain times,
And to build a common dream of America
In harmony with a healing world.

Amen.

Readings

"August Third," by May Sarton

These days
Lifting myself up
Like a heavy weight,
Old camel getting to her knees,
I think of my mother
And the inexhaustible flame
That kept her alive
Until she died.

She knew all about fatigue
And how one pushes it aside

For staking up the lilies
Early in the morning,
The way one pushes it aside
For a friend in need,
For a hungry cat.

Mother, be with me.
Today on your birthday
I am older than you were
When you died
Thirty-five years ago.
Thinking of you
The old camel gets to her knees,
Stands up,
Moves forward slowly
Into the new day.

If you taught me one thing
It was never to fail life.

"Working in the Rain," by Robert Morgan

My father loved more than anything to
Work outside in wet weather. Beginning
At daylight he'd go out in dripping brush
To mow or pull weeds for hog and chickens.
First his shoulders got damp and the drops from
His hat ran down his back. When even his

Armpits were soaked he came in to dry out
By the fire, make coffee, read a little.
But if the rain continued he'd soon be
Restless, and go out to sharpen tools in
The shed or carry wood in from the pile.
Then open up a puddle to the drain,
Working by steps back into the downpour.
I thought he sought the privacy of rain,
The one time no one was likely to be out
And he was left to the intimacy
Of drops touching every leaf and tree in
The woods and the easy muttering of
Drip and runoff, the shine of pools behind
Grass dams. He could not resist the long
Ritual, the companionship and freedom
Of falling weather, or even the cold
Drenching, the heavy soak and chill of clothes
And sobbing of fingers and sacrifice
Of shoes that earned a baking by the fire
And washed fatigue after the wandering
And loneliness in the country of rain.

Sermon *Remembering the Beloved* Rev. Bruce Davis (2213)

On these golden autumn days my wife Mary and I walk the old road that led from Lake Union to Lake Washington in the horse and buggy days of early Seattle. We have walked here a thousand times before—more times than we will walk this way in what remains of our lives. It's the path we used to call the Wiggly Trail with our children, for all the twists and turns, and Wiggly

Trail it remains for us in name and affection. Redwoods, cedars, maples and alders rise above this small sanctuary, a natural cathedral hidden amid the bustle of urban Northwest life. It's a sacred place for us in memory and in hope.

The first night of frost came our way a couple of weeks ago, and the maples began to loose their leaves in droves. As I kicked through the piles of yellow and brown leaves, I remembered Robert Frost's poem of the autumn season, "The Road Not Taken."

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
and sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
and looked down one as far as I could
to where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
and having perhaps the better claim
because it was grassy and wanted wear;
though as for that, the passing there
had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
in leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the one for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --
I took the one less traveled by,
and that has made all the difference

A light north breeze came up as we were walking, loosening the hold of the maple leaves' stems, and the leaves began to come down again, swooping and turning in the fresh fall air. What beauty and what grace in their gesture, and yes, what life! And yet we know that they have no more life in them now, separating from their vital source, falling to the forest floor, creating compost for the seedlings of tomorrow.

I spent a whole semester in college studying the poet, Rainier Maria Rilke, in his native German tongue. Like Frost, Rilke also felt a deep sentiment for the autumn season, and in his poem, "Autumn," the falling leaf is a symbol of our necessary human passing. But his is no morbid mood. Our fall is no less graceful than that of these dancing leaves in their last waltz, and for Rilke it ends in a holy place.

Autumn

The leaves are falling, falling as if from afar,
as if far away gardens were withering.
They fall with gestures as if to say "no" to their falling.

And in the nights the heavy earth is falling
Out of all the stars into aloneness.

We are all falling. This hand right here is falling.
And look at the others. It's in them all.

And yet of course there is that One, who holds
All this falling with infinite softness in gentle hands.

Mary and I at sixty may still be the children we've always been—or perhaps we try to relive fond memories we shared with our own children these many years ago, touching moments of beauty as if from afar. But in either case we laugh and run to catch the falling leaves as our children did three decades ago. It's not easy! The leaves are tricky little guys. At the last minute they twist away from your hands, like your older and more dexterous siblings used to do when you were playing tag.

I shouldn't admit this, because it sounds silly when I say it out loud, but I save some of the leaves I catch each year. I have a little altar with the dried leaves: lots of maple, some alder, a few oak. They are fully brown now, of course, and frozen into gestures of remarkable beauty. They are still and silent now, no longer rustling in the wind, no longer gathering water and nutrients from the good earth, no longer manufacturing food from the synthesis of light. Yet in their stillness is implied the richness of the lives they lived.

Contemplate for a moment the curled maple leaf on the cover of our Order of Service this morning.... This moment of stillness, this memory of a life lived.... It is a poem in pastels, revealing an essential beauty that transcends a merely mechanical existence.... A life that transcends its death.... To you, Helen Feeney, who caught this leaf in your own way, our deep gratitude.

Like the leaves I've saved on my small altar at home, so also I save lives of the people I've loved and lost. There are so many of these that no single altar could hold all their memories. I must rely on the breadth of the altar of my imagination and memory where the space is infinite and where time is at a standstill. Whether these beloved have died or simply passed from my day-to-day living, I feel their presence deeply, and my life continues to be enriched by them.

I call to that inner altar now my cousin Bobby, who was about six years older than I was. He died when he was about nineteen, drowned in an accident on his summer job recording the depth of lakes in northern Canada. He was my

hero! He was popular in high school and college. He played the guitar and sang the songs of the Kingston Trio and the Brothers Four. He was the pitcher on his high school and college teams. I think he might have become a minister. I looked up to him then, and the odd thing is that as a man in his sixties I *still* look up to this nineteen-year-old boy. Present on the screen of my soul, Bobby epitomizes honesty, authenticity, and confidence. I call his spirit to this inner altar and I find more honesty, authenticity, and confidence in myself.

Another who graces this sacred place within me is a person I first met in second grade. I remember games of hide and seek during recess, and private conversations full of seven-year-old wisdom. Though we flirted with “liking” each other in that way that children do, we realized in high school and college that we were meant to be sort of sister and brother. Our paths separated in adult years, busy with separate lives, yet when she died of cancer twenty years ago I felt loss and grief much greater than I’d anticipated. In that inner place she comes into my dreams still, more visitation than dream, more rekindling of friendship than mere memory. She is kindness incarnate. She is the shy, playful and gentle companion. As much as I may miss her, her presence is bigger than her absence, and I find in myself more kindness and sense of play when I call her to the altar in my soul, or when she shows up unbidden in my dreams.

There are so many who have gone before, who bring their essential selves back to me when I need, when I call. I must include here a man I met when I was in my mid-twenties, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Famously the guru for the Beatles, he invited me to be on his staff for a three-year period in the seventies. I ended that time to come back to the Northwest, to practice medicine, and to start a family. At one level it’s been thirty-five years since I’ve seen him. But at another level I’m still there, in his presence. When he died last winter, I felt deep sadness, as if an era had passed. Yet, when I meditate, his image presents on that inner screen of soul. As with my friend, Jeannie, Maharishi visits during my dreams, unbidden. Thirty years ago, during such dreams, I experienced my inadequacies and my shame in his presence. In more recent years I have felt deeply affirmed by him during such dreams. I can measure my own growing self-esteem and spiritual grounding in the evolution of this continuing interior relationship. When he is with me in that mind’s eye, that soul place, by call or by spontaneous presence, I feel deep silence, great warmth, and holy wisdom, qualities that I find growing, slowly but surely, in

myself.

We as a community have lost many of our beloved members. So often we may remember a Linda Moon, or a Don Chamberlin, or a Bill Kraemer, or a Kia Ahmnty. We remember each of them and many more for the unique beauty they shared with us. They are not gone, but are here; and I hope the day will come when we plan a memorial garden where our memories may be refreshed over and over again—memories of these beloved others who have meant so much to this Fellowship.

What I hope you are noticing here as I tell of these beloved persons is that the qualities I see in them are qualities that I am aspiring to. Even more than aspiring, the qualities I reverence in them are qualities that are emerging in my life ever more abundantly. These people who come into my memory are in a sense mirrors for the personal and spiritual growth of my life journey.

Here's an exercise that you can take home and try, individually or together. Take a large piece of paper and some colored pens or crayons. Start with a circle in the center, and write My Beloved Ones, there in the middle. Now put any number of arrows from that center circle that point to outer circles, and in each of the outer circles put the name of someone who has been important to you but who is now no longer an active part of your life. Next, around each of the outer circles, put the qualities that you most revere in these beloved others, qualities you remember and admire. Finally, use lots of color and pictures to illustrate this mind-map. Have fun with it. I'll write a session for our Covenant Circles that uses this process.

When you are done, imagine that you are each of these beloved persons. Put on their attributes as if you are putting on a coat. Feel within yourself their positive attributes, and notice that to greater or lesser extent those are affirmative qualities that are emerging in you. Keep this mind-map handy, maybe on the refrigerator for a while, and continue to embrace these attributes that you feel in the beloved others of your memory.

For me there is no one shape for the beloved, as there is no single experience of love. All three of the persons I mentioned, as unique as each was and as varied as my love is for each of them, represents to me the beloved. Imagine how rich my sense of the beloved becomes as I add to these three the other countless persons who have graced my life with their own unique

essence, their own piece of love's wholeness.

What is it that we build in our hearts as we embrace the beloved ones who have graced our lives? I think that the poet Rumi, of the Sufi tradition of Islam, has much to say about this. As we realize the beauty and meaning inherent in the beloved others of our life, we may begin to sense a relationship with Beauty and Meaning in their universal essence. The many beloved others point the way to the one mysterious Beloved beyond all of our earthly loves.

In Sufism this is no insipid or passive god but the divine manifest subtly, delicately, and profoundly as the Beloved. Similarly, in the Song of Songs of the Judeo-Christian tradition, God dances with us in passion. If we are drawn to the love of others, whom we remember dearly, by remembering the ultimate Beloved we may be consumed by the beauty and meaning of the universal lover.

From Rumi:

With the Beloved's water of life, no illness remains
In the Beloved's rose garden of union, no thorn remains.
They say there is a window from one heart to another
How can there be a window where no wall remains?

When you find yourself with the Beloved,
embracing for one breath,
In that moment you will find your true destiny.
Alas, don't spoil this precious moment.
Moments like this are very, very rare.

O Love, O pure deep Love, be here, be now,
Be all – worlds dissolve into your
stainless endless radiance,

Frail living leaves burn with your brighter
than cold stares –
Make me your servant, your breath, your core.

Today is the Day of the Dead. According to the *mythos* here, the veil between the living and the dead is attenuated for a brief time. According to the story, this is a time for making connections with those beloved others who have gone before. This is the time to embrace all those values and attributes that we remember in the beloved.

And if this is true, maybe this is a rare time when we may be able to see through that veil into the mystery, into the Beloved Beyond, into whose hands we are all falling, like autumn leaves, with infinite softness.

Amen.