



From UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST SMALL
GROUP MINISTRY
NETWORK WEBSITE



**Starr King Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Hayward, CA,
Facing Death, Grief, and Mourning
February 2019**

CHALICE LIGHTING

1 min

When death or dying comes calling at the door, like a bracing wind it clears our being of pettiness. It connects us to others. More alert to life's fragility, we reawaken to life's preciousness. To be fully human is to care, and attending to death prompts the most eloquent form of caring imaginable.

Forrest Church

OPENING WORDS

1 min

With courage we turn to look, with fear and love pulling us forward, death will greet us one day. We look, but we do not welcome, not this time, not next time, we only look, with courage.

Kate Walker

SILENT MEDITATION / CENTERING

2 min

The first sound of the gong brings us to silence. Please take time to center yourself, and temporarily push aside whatever might be preventing you from participating fully in tonight's session. The second sound of the gong returns us to each other's presence.

CHECK-IN (2 ROUNDS)

40 min

Please share some thing(s) about your life since last we met. If you feel comfortable about it, mention something that may have changed your relationship to death (your own or someone else's).

SONG: O DEATH (RALPH STANLEY VERSION)

2 min

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krIVsZP-YaY>

QUOTES & POEMS TO PONDER

15 min

GRIEF AND MOURNING

There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love.

Washington Irving

We all want to do something to mitigate the pain of loss or to turn grief into something positive, to find a silver lining in the clouds. But I believe there is real value in just standing there, being still, being sad. John Green

To spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness.

Erich Fromm

REMEMBERING (FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE ONE BEING REMEMBERED)

Do Not Stand At My Grave / Do not stand at my grave and weep / I am not there, I do not sleep / I am a 1,000 winds that blow / I am the diamond glints on snow / I am the sun on ripened grain / I am the gentle autumn rain / When you awaken in the morning's hush / I am the swift uplifting rush / Of quiet birds in circled light / I am the soft star that shines at night / Do not stand at my grave and cry / I am not there; I did not die. Anonymous

I'm Free / Don't grieve for me, for now I'm free / I'm following the path God laid for me. / I took His hand when I heard him call; / I turned my back and left it all. / I could not stay another day, / To laugh, to love, to work or play. / Tasks left undone must stay that way; / I found that place at the close of day. / If my parting has left a void, / Then fill it with remembered joy. / A friendship shared a laugh, a kiss; / Ah yes, these things, I too will miss. / Be not burdened with times of sorrow / I wish you the sunshine of tomorrow. / My life's been full, I savored much; / Good friends, good times, a loved ones touch. / Perhaps my time seems all to brief; / Don't lengthen it now with undue grief. / Lift up your heart and share with me, / God wanted me now, He set me free.

Linda Jo Jackson

All Is Well: Death is nothing at all, / I have only slipped into the next room / I am I and you are you / Whatever we were to each other, that we are still. / Call me by my old familiar name, / Speak to me in the easy way which you always used / Put no difference in your tone, / Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow / Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we enjoyed together. / Play, smile, think of me, pray for me. / Let my name be ever the household word that it always was, / Let it be spoken without effect, without the trace of shadow on it. / Life means all that it ever meant. / It is the same as it ever was, there is unbroken continuity. / Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight? / I am waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near, / Just around the corner. / All is well. Henry Scott-Holland.

I died a mineral, and became a plant. / I died a plant, and rose an animal. / I died an animal, and I was man. / Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?

Rumi

And so I shall go, in time, as all go and greet this sustaining earth with gratitude and pray I am worthy and have served Her well. Melitta Haslund

Saying goodbye, to some people, feels like the end of the world for them; but to others, it feels good. Author unknown

Don't cry because it is over. Smile because it happened. Theodor Seuss Geisel

GRIEVING TO ACCEPTANCE

Grief can awaken us to new values and new and deeper appreciations. Grief can cause us to reprioritize things in our lives, to recognize what's really important and put it first. Grief can heighten our gratitude as we cease taking the gifts life bestows on us for granted. Grief can give us the wisdom of being with death. Grief can make death the companion on our left who guides us and gives us advice. None of this growth makes the loss good and worthwhile, but it is the good that comes out of the bad. Roger Bertschausen

For Grief: When you lose someone you love, / Your life becomes strange, / The ground beneath you gets fragile, / Your thoughts make your eyes unsure; / And some dead echo drags your voice down / Where words have no confidence. / Your heart has grown heavy with loss; / And though this loss has wounded others too, /

No one knows what has been taken from you / When the silence of absence deepens.
/ Flickers of guilt kindle regret / For all that was left unsaid or undone. /
There are days when you wake up happy; / Again inside the fullness of life, /
Until the moment breaks and you are thrown back / Onto the black tide of loss. /
Days when you have your heart back, / You are able to function well / Until in
the middle of work or encounter / Suddenly with no warning, / You are ambushed by
grief. / It becomes hard to trust yourself. / All you can depend on now is that /
Sorrow will remain faithful to itself. / More than you, it knows its way / And
will find the right time / To pull and pull the rope of grief / Until the coiled
hill of tears / Has reduced to its last drop. / Gradually, you will learn
acquaintance / With the invisible form of your departed, / And when the work of
grief is done, / The wound of loss will heal / And you will have learned / To
wean your eyes / From the gap in the air / And be able to enter the hearth / In
your soul where your loved one / Has awaited your return / All the time.

John O'Donhue

When Sorrow Comes: When sorrow comes, let us accept it simply, as a part of
life. Let the heart be open to pain; let it be stretched by it. All the evidence
we have says that this is the better way. An open heart never grows bitter. Or if
it does, it cannot remain so. In the desolate hour, there is an outcry; a
clenching of the hands upon emptiness; a burning pain of bereavement; a weary
ache of loss. But anguish, like ecstasy, is not forever. There comes a
gentleness, a returning quietness, a restoring stillness. This, too, is a door to
life. Here, also, is a deepening of meaning—and it can lead to dedication; a
going forward to the triumph of the soul, the conquering of the wilderness. And
in the process will come a deepening inward knowledge that in the final
reckoning, all is well.

A. Powell Davies

Tossed by Difficult Times: We know that the love which blooms inside us is
stronger than fear, for people who love find strength they didn't know they had.
We know that the love inside us is stronger than illness, for people who love
hang in when physical health is gone. And we know that love is indeed stronger
than death, for people who love are like stones tossed into a pool; the circles
of love radiate out and echo back long after the stone has come to rest at the
bottom. So we remember, our love is the source of our strength. So we remember
who we are: lovers tossed by these difficult times.

William DeWolfe

Death is like an unmapped land - a place our minds can't fully comprehend, but on
the perimeters of which we are summoned to both new spiritual depths and sheer
terror. Maybe our only call, both for ourselves and for our culture in denial, is
to acknowledge this strange tension and learn to live with it. As others have
noted, intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at one
time. Perhaps an honest life means having the ability to do the same with death.

Laine Bergeson

Our beliefs are varied, but we are united by our mortality. We may not know
death, but we know loss. We may not see what's next, but we seek assurance. Let
love both ease our death, and soothe our soul.

Kate Walker

SONG: **Julian of Norwich (Sydney Carter)** **3.5 min**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-irwWT3oYg>

PREPARATION FOR GROUP REFLECTION **1 min**

BREAK **10 min**

GROUP REFLECTION (2 Rounds)

45 min

IDEAS FOR GROUP REFLECTION

- As a child when did you first become aware of death?
- How do your cultural and religious beliefs or world view, and whether or not you have a concept of an "afterlife", influence your view of death?
- Share your experience with loss and grief, and who and what practices were helpful for you?
- What role did your religious or world view beliefs and communities that you were connected with have in those experiences (e.g. attending a funeral, a wake ceremony, sitting shiva, etc.).
- How have funerals and/or memorial services affected you?
- Do you agree with Rollo May that the basic human dilemma of knowing we are mortal makes us anxious? Does it change how you act and interact with others?
- Rev. Forrest Church often said that religion is our response to being alive and knowing we will die. How has knowing that you will die shaped your spirituality and religion?

FUTURE TOPICS / SERVICE PROJECT

3 min

CLOSING SONG Turning Toward the Morning (Gordon Bok)

5 min

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0kmGoFH-X8>

SESSION FEEDBACK

5 min

CLOSING WORDS / EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE

1 min

Go your way, not knowing the answers to all things, yet seeking always the answer to one more thing than you know. Rev. John W. Brigham



OH DEATH (Most famous version by Ralph Stanley)

Oh Death, Whoa, death!
 Won't you spare me over 'til another
 year?
 Well, what is this, that I can't see?
 Both ice-cold hands taken hold of me
 Well, I am death none can excel
 I'll open the door to heaven or hell
 Oh, Death, well, someone would pray
 Could you wait to call me another day?
 The children prayed, the preacher
 preached
 Time and mercy is out of your reach
 I'll fix your feet 'til you can't walk
 I'll lock your jaw 'til you can't talk
 I'll close your eyes so you can't see
 This very hour, come and go with me
 Death, I come to take the soul
 Leave the body and leave it cold
 To drop the flesh off of the frame
 The earth and worms both have a claim
 Oh Death, Whoa, death!
 Won't you spare me over 'til another
 year?

My mother came to my bed,
 Placed a cold towel upon my head
 My head is warm, my feet are cold
 Death is a ' movin' upon my soul

My mother came to my bed,
 Placed a cold towel upon my head
 My head is warm, my feet are cold
 Death is a ' movin' upon my soul

Oh death! How you're treatin' me
 You closed my eyes so I can't see
 Well, you're hurtin' my body, you make
 me cold
 You run my life right out of my soul

Oh Death! Please consider my age
 Please don't take me at this stage
 My wealth is all at your command
 If you will move your icy hand
 Oh the young, the rich or poor
 All alike me, you know
 No wealth, no land, no silver, no gold
 Nothin' satisfies me but your soul

Oh death! Whoa, death!
 Won't you spare me over to another year
 Won't you spare me over to another year
 Won't you spare me over to another year



JULIAN OF NORWICH (Sydney Carter)

Loud are the bells of Norwich and the people come and go.
Here by the tower of Julian, I tell them what I know.

CHORUS: Ring out, bells of Norwich, and let the winter come and go
All shall be well again, I know.

Love, like the yellow daffodil, is coming through the snow.
Love, like the yellow daffodil, is Lord of all I know.

CHORUS

Ring for the yellow daffodil, the flower in the snow.
Ring for the yellow daffodil, and tell them what I know.

CHORUS

All shall be well, I'm telling you, let the winter come and go
All shall be well again, I know.

TURNING TOWARD THE MORNING (Gordon Bok)

You could swear he's out there singing
Of your sorrow.

When the deer has bedded down
And the bear has gone to ground,
And the northern goose has wandered off
To warmer bay and sound,
It's so easy in the cold to feel
The darkness of the year
And the heart is growing lonely
For the morning

CHORUS (after each verse):

Oh, my Joanie, don't you know
That the stars are swinging slow,
And the seas are rolling easy
As they did so long ago?
If I had a thing to give you,
I would tell you one more time
That the world is always turning
Toward the morning.

Now October's growing thin
And November's coming home;
You'll be thinking of the season
And the sad things that you've seen,
And you hear that old wind walking,
Hear him singing high and thin,

When the darkness falls around you
And the Northwind come to blow,
And you hear him call you name out
As he walks the brittle snow:
That old wind don't mean you trouble,
He don't care or even know,
He's just walking down the darkness
Toward the morning.

When the darkness falls around you
And the Northwind come to blow,
And you hear him call you name out
As he walks the brittle snow:
That old wind don't mean you trouble,
He don't care or even know,
He's just walking down the darkness
Toward the morning.

It's a pity we don't know
What the little flowers know.
They can't face the cold November
They can't take the wind and snow:
They put their glories all behind them,
Bow their heads and let it go,
But you know they'll be there shining
In the morning.

Now, my Joanie, don't you know
That the days are rolling slow,
And the winter's walking easy,
As he did so long ago?
And, if that wind would come and ask
you,
"Why's my Joanie weeping so?"
Won't you tell him that you're weeping
For the morning?