

**Life Passages**

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:**

How ungenerously in later life we disclaim the virtuous moods of our youth, living in retrospect long, summer days of unreflecting dissipation, Dresden figures of pastoral gaiety! Our wisdom, we prefer to think, is all of our own gathering, while, if the truth be told, it is, most of it, the last coin of a legacy that dwindles with time. There is no candour in a story of early manhood which leaves out of account the home-sickness for nursery morality, the regrets and resolutions of amendment, the black hours which, like zero on the roulette table, turn up with roughly calculable regularity.

-From *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh

**Focus Reading:**

**The Layers**

by Stanley Kunitz

I have walked through many  
lives,  
some of them my own,  
and I am not who I was,  
though some principle of being  
abides, from which I struggle  
not to stray.  
When I look behind,  
as I am compelled to look  
before I can gather strength  
to proceed on my journey,  
I see the milestones dwindling  
toward the horizon  
and the slow fires trailing  
from the abandoned camp-sites,  
over which scavenger angels  
wheel on heavy wings.  
Oh, I have made myself a tribe  
out of my true affections,  
and my tribe is scattered!  
How shall the heart be  
reconciled to its feast of losses?

In a rising wind  
the manic dust of my friends,  
those who fell along the way,  
bitterly stings my face.  
Yet I turn, I turn,  
exulting somewhat,  
with my will intact to go  
wherever I need to go,  
and every stone on the road  
precious to me.  
In my darkest night,  
when the moon was covered  
and I roamed through wreckage,  
a nimbus-clouded voice  
directed me:  
"Live in the layers,  
not on the litter."  
Though I lack the art  
to decipher it,  
no doubt the next chapter  
in my book of transformations  
is already written.  
I am not done with my changes.

**Focus Questions:**

Are you one to reflect on the past, or not?

Charlotte Bronte wrote in *Jane Eyre*, that "Remorse is the poison of life". Do you agree?

Do you believe that “Things happen for a reason”?

What do you think of the popular Christian saying, “Please be patient with me, God isn’t finished with me yet”? Is it acknowledgement of our being a work in progress, or a way to excuse poor behavior?

What was your happiest time?

**Closing Words and Extinguishing Chalice:**

There's a trick to the Graceful Exit, I suspect. It begins with the vision to recognize when a job, a life stage, a relationship, is over and to let it go. It means leaving what's over without denying its validity or its past importance in our lives. It involves a sense of the future, a belief that every exit line is an entry, we are moving on rather than out...It's hard to learn that we don't leave the best parts of ourselves behind, back in the dugout or the Capital or the office. We own what we learned back there, the experience and the growth are grafted onto our lives. And when we exit, we can take ourselves along. Quite gracefully."

*-Ellen Goodman*

The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts.

*-Bertrand Russell*