

**UNIVERSALIST UNITARIAN CHURCH - Waterville, Maine**

**Date: Sunday, November 13th, 2022**

**Theme: “Death Changes Everything”** We will explore together the mysteries of death, the ways we can cope with it, and how to live our best lives in the face of its inevitability. (*This service includes several grief poems.*)

**Worship Leader: Rev. “Twinkle” Marie Manning**

**Call to Worship/Opening Words:**

**The Dark Season**

by: “Twinkle” Marie Manning

We are at the threshold of the Seasons,  
the doorway to the Year,  
When the Veil is thin,  
and time passes amorphously.

We turn inward as the Darkness beckons us.  
We welcome the warmth of the fire,  
contemplating the mysteries of the Unseen.

We honor the soft ache in our hearts  
for those we have lost:  
the people,  
the dreams.

And we rest.  
For rest we must, to heal.

This is the cycle of death and rebirth;  
release and renewal.

We cherish this time  
as the lessons it offers  
penetrate our knowing.

May we breathe in wisdom  
and breathe out patience.

**Reading/Meditation:**

**The Triage of Grief**

by: "Twinkle" Marie Manning

They sat with me for hours in this spot.  
Sometimes talking.  
Much of the time just being still,  
gazing at Autumn's tranquil beauty  
and listening to the sounds of the Lake.

For some this may look like healing.

I know with experienced certainty it is not.  
Not yet.

This, this is the perpetual triage of *raw grief*.

Keep the body still.  
Regulate the breath.  
Quiet the mind.  
Assess the wound.

Allow tears, laughter or lethargy to come.  
Keep in check the anger.

When there is energy, do something useful, purposeful.

Ardently cradle the sorrow when it assails.

Repeat.  
Repeat.  
Repeat.

## **MESSAGE: “Death Changes Everything”**

By Rev. “Twinkle” Marie Manning

“You, having existed, changed everything.  
You, having died, changed everything.

And somehow life moves onward.”

None of us can know with any certainty what happens after this human life, or what happens before it, or beyond it.

None of us can know with any certainty that there is indeed a meaning to life, to living. Let alone a meaning to death and dying.

Yet to create a vision for these things is intuitive to human nature.

For as long as humans have etched into stone and written records onto paper, they have documented beliefs in deities, in afterlives, in supernatural elements and creatures.

Humans, out of hope and fear and curiosity and wonder, have created mystical and mysterious stories naming characters and characteristics of that which they identify as holy and sacred and true.

### **That which they imagine the holiest of places to be:**

*Elysium, Heaven, Mag Mell, Nirvana, Shambhala, Shangri-la, the Summerland, Svarga, Tír Tairngire, Valhalla, Vaikuntha.*

### **That which they believe to be lost paradises:**

*Atlantis, Eden, El Dorado, Lemuria, Mu.*

### **That which they imagine are places of punishment:**

*Hell, Irkalla, Kur, Naraka, Tartarus, Xibalba.*

### **That which they believe to be otherworldly places:**

*Annwn, Fairyland, Kunlun, Nysa, Olympus, Zerzura.*

**And, every imaginable kind of creature, both noble and nefarious: Aliens, Angels, Banshees, Centaurs, Cerberuses, Demons, Dopplegangers, Dragons, Elves, Fairies, Ghosts, Gnomes, Goblins, Gods,**

*Goddesses, Griffins, Gargoyles, Leprechauns, Leviathan, Melusine, Mermaids, Minotaurs, Mothmen, Nymphs, Phoenixes, Pixies, Reapers, Shadow People, Shapeshifters, Sirens, Sprites, Sylphs, Unicorns, Valkyries, Vampires, Wendigos, Werewolves, Wraiths.*

*The Graveyard Book* by **Neil Gaiman**, in the young adult genre - yet really a cautious read if of the faint of heart, explores the possibility that our final resting place, where the body is buried, is where the soul resides in the afterlife.

And that their afterlives can be just as vibrant and family and community-oriented in the cemeteries as they were in the physical realm.

Many cultures honor similar beliefs by visiting gravesites regularly, even cultures who organize annual celebrations and jubilees to connect with their honored dead. Bringing gifts as they do, not just to the loved ones they knew in life, but also their ancestors long dead. Ancient Ones and Ascended Masters.

**Christopher Penczak**, award winning author and founder of *The Temple of Witchcraft*, in his book entitled *The Might Dead*, offers a comprehensive list of who such Holy Ones are, how they've been referred to over time and throughout various cultures and lineages, as well as how to connect with them.

Within *The Might Dead* book he quotes Dion Fortune, a female British occultist and esoteric teacher born in 1890, who said,  
*“Who you are now, they once were.  
Who they are now, you can be.”*

Chris says that,

*“Each tradition has its own separate clan and family of masters. There are overarching collectives for greater world religions, and then specific groups tied to specific lineage traditions.”*

Some, such as, *“Theosophists would look at the multidimensional nature of enlightened consciousness, where there is no separation, and believe in a collective and connective awareness that simply manifests in different families, and tribes, based up on the assumptions and predilections of the mystic approaching them.”*

There are also people who are convinced of the theory that spirits with remains in unmarked graves will eventually forget themselves as they are forgotten by the world of people who once knew them. And in such forgetting, they evaporate into nothingness.

Alternately some believe that that is what happens at death anyways. The end of consciousness. No spirit. No other realm or “*beyond.*”

Still others ponder that maybe, *just maybe*, there remains echos of us in the places we’ve trod in our physical lives. Echos we can tune into while in spirit-form and essentially teleport there on a thought or upon the wave of a feeling.

Some consider, too, that sprinkling the hair and nail clippings of our dead ones lost to death, will connected them to this place in time.

Indeed, that sprinkling such remnants of them in places dear to us, and throughout the globe, even if they were never there while alive, can allow their spirits to hone in and track their DNA and visit such locations.

In both cases, whether they visited while alive or had their DNA placed there afterwards, it is considered that the more time spent in a location, the more DNA residue remains as a beacon for one’s spiritual essence to reach.

Many cultures also believe that scattering remains in the form of ashes sets their loved one’s spirit to be free to roam near or as far away as they wish.

Many who have had near-death experiences recall firsthand accounts of interactions with mystical peoples, places and things.

Others who have come back from death’s door report there was nothing to see, that death was nothing more than an off switch.

Were these experiences their minds playing tricks on them? Offering up one imaginary scenario or another, confirming or challenging their assumed set belief structures?

## What happens when we die?

During an interview (~~in 2019~~) in recent years on the *Late Show* **Stephen Colbert** asked **Keanu Reeves** this question, “What do you think happens when we die?”

After a moment, Keanu responded:

***“I know that the ones who love us will miss us.”***

That is about the only thing we can know with any level of definitiveness.

***We know the ones who love us will miss us.***

## What happens when we die?

Humans can, and have ***and do*** often, spend lifetimes attempting to determine the capital “T” truth of this.

Yet, I do not believe, at least at this present moment, that unrequited searching is beneficial to Living Life as a Prayer.

While I believe spiritual exploration is vital to a healthy human life, I posit that a life well-lived is one that is attuned to the here and now.

One that is content with living out this human expression to the fullest possible extent, rather than endless searches for confirmations of the hereafter and exhausting strivings towards so called “enlightenment” or “ascension.”

We are in these human forms. Whether we are animist, deist or theist, humanist, agnostic or atheist, it is to our benefit to *Live Life as a Prayer*.

And, if it feels right in our hearts to hold beliefs illustrating specific forms of afterlives and mystical places and creatures, then I honor that.

More than that, I recommend that you create your spiritual practices around the beliefs you hold dear.

What do **I** believe happens when we die? My response to that has changed over time. I expect it will continue to change, as my journey is an ever-evolving one.

I write speak to this as a woman who has lost many loved ones to death: most recently one of my children.

Over the years I have called upon my dead loved ones, my brother, my father, my mother, my godfather, my grandparents, my lover.

All died, most far too young by our human standards. Certainly far too soon by *my* preferences.

I've reached out to them mostly when I am in the midst of uncertainty, sometimes merely missing them, or when I experience something I know would bring a smile to their faces.

It brings me comfort to do so.  
To talk with the "ghost" of them.

Likewise with the death of my son. Riley. I talk with him in dreams and in daylight, just as I do the others.

It does not bring them back, but it keeps them close.

Some may say it is only the imprint of their memories -  
- *I am OK with that.*

But to me, in the moments I am connecting with them, it feels real and sacred and true.

I am more a deist than a theist, at present. I find it hard to reconcile the horrific situations of war and disease and domestic and community violence and countless struggles on Earth with the idea that any loving God/**dess** is monitoring the situation.

Yet, it is hard to let go of the idea of creation for the wonder and the beauty and the mathematical perfection *and the synchronicity of Life is too vast* to be anything less than orchestrated somehow; certainly some kind of magical.

I am also an animist, for I feel the life in all things.

So, logically, if there are energetic forces that the human body cannot see, but we can feel or sense, then it stands to reason, at least to me, that there can be shapes and forms of creatures and places that exist as well.

And that brings me comfort.

When someone we love dies, we deserve comfort.  
When someone we love dies, we need comfort.

***We need comfort!***

And we need to take time to rest.

Time to care for our own aching heart.  
Time to sooth our often racing mind.  
Time to solace our faith.

And, eventually, time to process. Processing in our own time.

May we seek and receive comfort and rest and soothing and solace in the ways most helpful to us.

What is helpful to me is writing. It always has been. So when my son died, I wrote and shared this with friends:

*“Our son Riley passed away on September 20th, 2019.*

*He was only 22.*

*He had the brightest smile and the bluest blue eyes.*

*He was so sweet and sensitive.*

*He had such a caring and intuitive heart.*

*A true empath.*

*We are shattered by his death.*

*We’ve been told as we awaited his transition,*

*he was surrounded by angels*

*and the spirits of his family who passed before him,*

*grandparents, uncles, ancestors.*

*Some among us believe he now resides with Jesus,*

*or a Heaven of his own choosing.*



*Others of us feel his essence is now energy,  
with freedom to exist  
in ways he rarely could while on Earth.*

*Still others feel he will soon reincarnate  
to greet us once again as a new grandchild.*

*My brother in-law suggests:  
“the angels some saw  
were really Valkyries  
taking this warrior who died in his battle  
to sit at the side of Odin  
with his forefather warriors for an eternal feast.”*

*I can envision that.  
For my Riley was as strong as any warrior  
ever to walk this world or any realm beyond.*

*Yet I also believe that after a while of respite at Odin’s banquet table,  
that Riley would embark on a new mission  
to bring more light to our world.*

*I miss him.  
I love him.  
I want to hug him and hold him.  
That’s all I can say right now.”*

~ Marie Porter-Manning  
September 27th, 2019

That is still, *three years later*, about all I can say about his death. But the vision is enough to carry me through.

And carry me through, it must.

When someone we love dies, there is a void in our life. This void **will** be filled, so it is crucial that we consciously determine what we wish to fill it with. If unattended to, the cultural defaults we’ve inherited will take root in the space.

Grief is a natural thing when coping with the loss of a loved one. Grief, sadness, even anger, all play a role in navigating through the loss.

They are not meant to take up permanent residency. Yet they will if you do not prepare and tend to your grief carefully.

Give yourself adequate space and time and *mechanisms* to heal.

If the death was tragic or traumatic for you, you will need more space, and possibly the assistance of a qualified therapist to cope and then heal.

I do not necessarily conform to the the adage that “*time heals all wounds*” for death is not something humans have found a way to reverse. Best we can all tell, physical death is a permanent condition.

The death of a loved one is a lasting change to our lives. Indeed, the death of a loved one changes everything.

But, when tenderly attended to, the pain of the loss can be transformed into something beautiful. Doing so will enhance your life force, and your life’s experience.

Not attending to your grief, will perpetually deplete your life force, and diminish your life’s experience.

Know that while moving forward is necessary, “moving on” is impossible.

***Moving forward is necessary,  
“moving on” is impossible.***

Our loved-one’s death was more than a moment; their life is more than a memory. Their existence is ever-present as they shape our lives even now.

Because they have lived, your life changed;  
because they died, your life changed.

Grief is a spectrum and a collage.

It contains all our emotions, sometimes at the same time. And, when we lose many people, the recommendation of “move on” may seem as a sanity-saving measure.

I promise you it is not.

Moving on is impossible. Yet, Moving **forward** is **necessary**.

Author, Nora McInerny speaks poignantly and pointedly to this in her much acclaimed TED Talk, “We Don’t ‘Move on’ from Grief. We Move Forward with It.”

In her work she discusses how moving forward, such as falling in love with someone new and wonderful after someone you love dies, can help you realize the enormity of what you lost. She affirms that two parallel plot lines can exist and unfurl at once in your life.

New and beautiful things and happy things **and** grief for the former and lost things are not two opposing forces, they are strands to the same thing.

Dianalee Velie, Poet Laurette of Newbury, New Hampshire, in her poem entitled, “Laughter,” movingly describes the sensation of joy and laughter the first times it occurs amid deep grief as something, “alien, at first, a mysterious sound we had forgotten.”

Something we can be caught off guard by, even embarrassed about when it bubbles up.

*“How can joy be excused when it filters through our galled gazes?”*

She questions, as many of us have questioned while grieving.

Yet, it is part of our human nature to experience multiple emotions at once, even ones that seem counter to each other. We *can* experience joy alongside our grief, **and do**.

Be grateful for any joyful moments and feelings that occur during your times of grief. They will help you stay connected to your human experiences, rather than be swept away by your grief.

They will contribute to healing your broken heart.

Acknowledge, accept and embrace whichever emotions are present for you.

The person you lost to death can, and often will, remain ever-present in your life.

The deep grief can transition to less painful emotions such as deep gratitude and abiding love, but this is on **your** timeline, *no one else's*.

*Some* may wish to rush you through your grief, or encourage you to bypass it in some way, or simply to handle your grief in the manner in which they've dealt with theirs.

Not only is that not fair, it is not healthy.

**You are the **arbitrator** of your own grief.**

Give yourself permission to feel what you feel, to coddle your pain, to hold it as only you can.

Give yourself permission to seek help to navigate your grief in the form of a counselor, a sabbatical, a meditative art therapy program or a positive change in your lifestyle.

And, then, when you are ready:  
give yourself permission to move forward from deep grief.

Give yourself permission to live your life fully, even though your vision for that life now must change because the person you were envisioning to be on that journey with you- at least in physical form - has died.

One more thought about that....

Rev. Kathleen McTigue tells us about those we've lost to death,

*"They are with us still."* (She affirms!)

*"The lives they lived hold us steady.*

*Their words remind us and call us back to ourselves.*

*Their courage and love evoke our own.*

*We, the living, carry them with us:  
we are their voices, their hands and their hearts.  
We take them with us,  
and with them choose the deeper path of living.”*  
(McTigue - “They are with Us Still.”)

Yes, living your life fully, embracing joy where possible, moving *forward* after loss honors those we’ve lost and it is the path of *Living Your Life as a Prayer*.

**You, while still living, *change everything*.**

May it be so.  
Blessed Be.

### **Pastoral benediction/Closing Words**

May we ever remember that death changes everything.  
It changes us, irrevocably from the time of the loss.  
It changes us, inevitably as it is the unrelenting processional path we are all on.  
May our unique understandings that bring meaning to the cycles of life, and of death, bring us strength.  
May our rituals and memorials comfort us.  
May death’s forthcoming remind us to live fully,  
To cherish those we love with our actions, words, and energies.  
And to *Live Life As A Prayer* each and every day.