



White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church

Grow Your Soul & Serve the World

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Theme for November

Mortality - the practice of being alive

Each month, our church gathers around a monthly theme and practice to guide our congregational life: worship, small groups, religious education, justice, and classes. Use these readings for reflection around the dinner table, in your own prayer practice, alone or with others.

More online at www.wbuuc.org/themes.

QUESTIONS

How does awareness of your mortality impact your living today?

How do you balance the demands of everyday life with the desire to live fully?

In what ways have you experienced mortality in your own life and relationships?

What makes you feel alive?

QUOTES

To suspect your own mortality is to know the beginning of terror; to learn irrefutably that you are mortal is to know the end of terror.

- Frank Herbert

To be idle is a short road to death and to be diligent is a way of life; foolish people are idle, wise people are diligent.

- Buddha

It is not the end of the physical body that should worry us. Rather, our concern must be to live while we're alive - to release our inner selves from the spiritual death that comes with living behind a facade designed to conform to external definitions of who and what we are.

- Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

The glory of God is humanity fully alive.

- St. Augustine

POETRY & LYRICS

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.
- John Donne (originally a passage form a larger piece of prose)

The Thing Is

to love life, to love it even
when you have no stomach for it
and everything you've held dear
crumbles like burnt paper in your hands,
your throat filled with the silt of it.
When grief sits with you, its tropical heat
thickening the air, heavy as water
more fit for gills than lungs;
when grief weights you like your own flesh
only more of it, an obesity of grief,
you think, *How can a body withstand this?*
Then you hold life like a face
between your palms, a plain face,
no charming smile, no violet eyes,
and you say, yes, I will take you
I will love you, again.
- Ellen Bass

And then there are all the wounded
The poor the deaf the lonely and the old
Whom I have roughly dismissed
As if I were not one of them...
Remember them. I beg you to remember them
When winter is over
And all your unimaginable promises
Burst into song on death's bare branches.
- Anne Porter

The Parade

How exhilarating it was to march
along the great boulevards
in the sunflash of trumpets
and under all the waving flags—
the flag of ambition, the flag of love.

So many of us streaming along—
all of humanity, really—
moving in perfect step,
yet each lost in the room of a private
dream.

How stimulating the scenery of the world,
the rows of roadside trees,
the huge curtain of the sky

How endless it seemed until we veered
off the broad turnpike
into a pasture of high grass,

headed toward the dizzying cliffs of
mortality.

Generation after generation,
we keep shouldering forward
until we step off the lip into space.

And I should not have to remind you
that little time is given here
to rest on a wayside bench,
to stop and bend to the wildflowers,
or to study a bird on a branch—
not when the young
are always shoving from behind,
not when the old keep tugging us
forward,
pulling on our arms with all their feeble
strength.

- Billy Collins

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

~Rumi

EXCERPT

Getting old is the second-biggest surprise of my life, but the first, by a mile, is our unceasing need for deep attachment and intimate love. We oldies yearn daily and hourly for conversation and a renewed domesticity, for company at the movies or while visiting a museum, for someone close by in the car when coming home at night. This is why we throng Match.com and OkCupid in such numbers -- but not just for this, surely. Rowing in Eden (in Emily Dickinson's words: "Rowing in Eden --/Ah -- the sea") isn't reserved for the lithe and young, the dating or the hooked-up of the just lavishly married, or even for couples in the middle-aged mixed-doubles semifinals, thank God. No personal confession or revelation impends here, but these feelings in old folks are widely treated like a raunchy secret. The invisibility factor -- you've had your turn -- is back at it again. But I believe that everyone in the world wants to be with someone else tonight, together in the dark, with the sweet warmth of a hip or a foot or a bare expanse of shoulder within reach. Those of us who have lost that, whatever our age, never lose the longing: just look at our faes. If it returns, we seize upon it avidly, stunned and altered again.

- Roger Angell