

Worship Service for September 12, 2021

Skagit Unitarian Universalist Church
Rev. Vincent Lachina, Speaker
Rosemary Stevens, Celebrant

Honoring Those Who Have Died

Good morning. The past 18 months of the virus pandemic have been exceptionally hard for everyone. At times we have all felt separated from those we know and love. It has been even more difficult for families who have lost loved ones but have not been able to honor them appropriately. As an important part of our service today, we would like to begin today's message by spending a few minutes honoring three remarkable women and one amazing man from this congregation who have died during the past months. As an introduction, I would like to share these words from the lyrics of a song by Jimmy Webb written after the death of his father:

Only One Life –

Only one life, just a single spark
Only one life, what does it mean
It's only birth and death and everything between
If living is a pointless chore, just existence, nothing more
Why does **only one life** leave such an empty space

One life – make it right or wrong
Only One Life.

Just another soul among so many, so who cares if one should fall
But though we're small, we're full of magic
When we touch the world, we change it all
With **Only One Life**

We only have one chance to fight, but if we live it right
All we need is one life to make a difference here
One life – it's such a small amount
One life – to say we care so loud and clear
We have to make it count after all
With **Only One Life**

Today we will honor Nikki Hamilton, Elmyra Zehner, Peggy Bissell and Warren Keuffel. Warren died just a few days ago while visiting his family in Salt Lake City and was cremated there. A formal obituary hasn't been published yet, but it will be posted to the church website when it is available. Most of us will remember Warren as the larger-than-life man who sat on the front row so that he could read lips or to be closer to the sound. I remember Warren as a thoughtful man who always asked me for a printed copy of my message so that he could read it later. He will be terribly missed here at SUUF. Here are some remembrances of the other three members who have died during the pandemic. Their full obituaries will also be posted on the church website later along with the SUUF Tree of Life honoring all of our SUUF faith family who have died before. Now we would like to share a shorter version of Nikki, Elmyra and Peggy's obituaries. These will be shared by their friends, Jim Heard, Rosemary Stevens, and Kathy Roche-Zujko. Jim, will you begin?

(Reading of obits)

Thank you. Perhaps you are aware of another person who has died during this pandemic. We're going to spend a minute or two in silence now, reflecting on these four friends. If you know of someone else you would like to include in our Joys and Sorrows later in the service, please feel free to place their name and their relationship to you in the Chat Room. They will also be recognized during our time of sharing.

(Quiet time for 1 or 2 minutes)

Message: A Day of Remembering

Yesterday was a very solemn day for many of us. It marked the 20th anniversary of the bombings of the World Trade Center buildings in New York, the attack on the Pentagon, the crash of Flight 93 and the more than 3000 lives lost in those terrorist acts. Some of us can remember where we were when we heard this on the news. The impact of this attack still registers with many of us 20 years later. Today we also want to spend time remembering those in our lives who have died during the past 18 months of the Covid pandemic, some from the virus, and others from different causes. Any time we stop to reflect and remember the death of anyone, it causes us to engage in an internal struggle with sadness and grief. This is our human nature to find and express our compassion and empathy. Sadly, grief never ends, but it changes. It's a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness nor a lack of faith. It is simply the price of love.

Ironically, the losses we experience are not always of human lives. During the past 18 months or more, we have felt the loss of things less tangible than a loved one. As we sit here this morning looking at a computer screen in order to see our faith family, we realize that we have lost the joy of human contact with those who mean so very much to us. Sitting beside a friend, standing during coffee hour chatting, sharing a cup of soup on Souper Sunday, and so much more. . .we have temporarily lost that, and it is definitely sad. Isolating ourselves has led to a sense of loneliness and sometimes even depression. With schools closed and children doing all their education at home, there has been a feeling of the loss of peer group social interaction. Working from home separates us from our workmates and we sometimes get a feeling of flying solo. There is only so much a video class or a Zoom meeting can do to eliminate these inner personal challenges.

With this weight on our minds and hearts, we might struggle with finding anything positive in the midst of all this negative reality. Those who know me are well aware that I have an affection for The Golden Girls television series. In one of those episodes, Dorothy and her mother Sophia enter a beauty and talent contest at a home for the elderly. When they were sharing about their victory, Dorothy said about the losing woman, “She sang the song, ‘Try to Remember, and she couldn’t.” Perhaps that could be us – trying to remember the good days and we just can’t quite get there. Let me share with you the words to that song as a reminder:

*Try to remember the kind of September,
When life was slow and oh so mellow.
Try to remember the kind of September,
When grass was green and grain was yellow.
Try to remember the kind of September,
When you were a tender and callow fellow.
Try to remember, and if you remember,
Then follow (follow) follow (follow) follow
Try to remember when life was so tender,
That no one wept except the willow,
Try to remember when life was so tender,
That dreams were kept beside your pillow.
Try to remember when life was so tender,
That love was an ember about to billow,
Try to remember, and if you remember,
Then follow (follow) follow*

Let me encourage you to try and remember that there are many small but life-changing acts that we can do even in the middle of hard times like that these we are all currently experiencing. Think about these:

- Try to remember what it feels like to open your mailbox and find a card or letter with our name on it, and it's not a bill or junk mail. It's a love note from someone who thought of you and sent you a reminder that you are important and that you are being thought of.
- Try to remember how good you feel when you answer the phone and it's the voice of a friend or family member who has called for no particular reason except to say "I care" or "I miss you."

- Try to remember the joyful surprise when someone shows up at your front door with a thoughtful dish of something homemade, or even a purchased treat from the bakery. And the only reason is that they wanted to share.
- Try to remember how much fun it might be to sit with family and maybe a friend and complete a jigsaw puzzle together. Or watch a movie. Or feast on ice cream. Just so you can be together and perhaps laugh.
- Try to remember how nice it could be to arrange a distanced meeting with a neighbor or friend whose pet and your pet enjoy playing together in the park. Standing six feet away in your masks catching up on both four-legged and two-legged friends.
- Try to remember the calming and rewarding feeling you as an individual get from observing a quiet time of reading one of your favorite books or listening to your favorite music. So that you can have some “me” time.
- Try to remember the tenderness you would feel from a walk by the river or stroll through a park or a family outing that simply takes you away from being inside your home, if for no other reason than to feel a sense of “escape” from being inside so much.

My hope is that you and I can spend time remembering the people and things we have lost, but that we can give as much time to the beautiful parts of life that need our attention now more than ever. As the song say, *“Try to remember when life was so tender, that love was an ember about to billow, Try to remember, and if you remember,*

Then follow” that. Follow your heart it can be the source of healing and comfort.

Now as we share in our Joys and Sorrows, I encourage you to share with our faith family your own joys as we also remember our lost loved ones and other sorrows..

Those noted in the chat room whom we will also remember in our Sorrows and Prayers:

Naomi Sherer
Jimmy Wilson
Catherine Carter
Hans Mangels
Eric Tayler
Rick May
Sister Ann
Sister Susan
Tony

Prayer for the People

In the midst of our upended lives, let us pray that we can find a balance between the losses we have suffered and the hope that we are searching for. May each of us seek to both remember the lives that are no longer a part of our world and remember the opportunities we are given to find comfort and solace for ourselves and for others.

As we try to remember, may we find new ways to turn our difficult days into times when we can focus on others with compassion and love. Help us to remember with tender hearts and to follow and act on those things we can do for

others who need us. This is our prayer on this Day of
Remembering.

Amen