

## Sermon on remembrance

Tomorrow the US celebrates Veteran's Day and Tuesday is titled Remembrance Day in the United Kingdom which is a commemoration of all those who died during World War I. When I was a young au pair in that country during the early 70's I was surprised by the number of British people who still referred to that conflict as the Great War.

Many of the people whose lives we memorialize on Veteran's day never lived long enough to create their legacy. It occurred to me that we can take the time to think about the message our own lives are making. We can pause and think about how we will be remembered. In a world where so many people are not emotionally healthy, it helps to step back and ponder who we are as individuals. Are we angry, depressed, controlling? Do we bring life into the room or do we suck the oxygen from it when we enter? (I'm thinking here of an ex boss).

We move forward from the death of someone we loved or admired by using that person's life as an inspiration to us. We become the individual's living legacy by embracing their spirit. When Gandhi was practicing his great silence he was asked, "What is your message?" Gandhi passed the person a note on which was written, "My life is my message."

We can benefit from the lives of people who have left us with more difficult memories as a lesson in transformation. Roger Walsh, who wrote the book *Essential Spirituality*, writes, "See the world as a scared schoolhouse designed to heal and awaken us." A few years ago when my father was dying his wife of one year tried to push me out of his hospital room. It was a very difficult time for me because I had welcomed her into

our family after our mom had died. I was able (eventually) to accept what had happened, to forgive her, and to move forward. But first, I chose to use the experience as a lesson. I want to remember to not be so controlling that I assume my way is the only acceptable outcome. It hasn't been easy. But it has helped me move forward (pause). So, if you have somewhat bitter or negative memories of a loved one, try to think of the lesson the universe had prepared for you.

It might have been to set clearer boundaries with a relative, or not to let addiction control one's life. Perhaps the lesson was to pay more attention to family and friends.

Whatever your memory is, you can choose to transform what will become your own legacy when you die.

Some of you may be familiar with the poem *The Dash*. It's a metaphor for your tombstone on which will be written your name, your date of birth, DASH, your date of death. It concerns what one's dash will say about him or her.

Ann Hennessey's life is a good example. I only knew her a brief time but I believe she gave kindness and time to people she met throughout her day. My husband and I were delighted to be invited to have lunch with Ann and some of you last January. Her openness and generosity were an illustration of the principle of illuminating the lives of others.

There are many ways we can transform ourselves. Behaviors we can develop to become who we aspire to be. Here are a few ideas on creating your legacy. Practice gratitude. Research has shown that if you practice something everyday for 21 days it

becomes a habit. I have seen it work in my own life. Here is an act you can turn into a habit: everyday write down 5 things for which you are grateful. Now, if you are going through a rough patch, your 5 items may be as simple as: 'I woke up' or 'a chickadee came to the birdfeeder.' But if you persist in the endeavor of practicing gratitude it can yield enriching results. When I first started working on this I discovered that it helps to find a time of day when you can actually contemplate those moments or items for which you are grateful. I did it at night before I went to bed. Whenever I became distracted about something which was not going right in my life, I found it helpful to practice gratitude.

Developing awareness is another way to further our legacy. We can take the time every day to become more aware of how we interact with other people as well as how we are living our daily lives. I have become increasingly aware of how much multitasking does not work in my life. I may be doing five things at once but none of them are accomplished with awareness. How many of us use our cell phones when we are on the highway to do other business? Meanwhile we aren't paying attention to our driving. We need to remember where we are and stop. Or we need to apologize to the insurance clerk who is only following company policy but upon whom we have taken our frustrations out? Are we taking people for granted? Do we take the time to look attendants in the eye when they hand us a coffee or our coat? By taking time to become aware of those areas in our lives which need fine tuning, we have opportunities to become more compassionate, grateful, and peaceful.

Avoid negativity. Have you noticed there are some people who exude pessimism? They are the Eeyores of our lives. They are people who do not have anything good to say about others. One of my friends and I decided to give up gossiping one Lent (back to the ex boss issues). It was really difficult to change the climate at lunch hour for ourselves and our colleagues. I'm not sure why it is so much easier to see all that is going wrong in the day rather than that which is going right but human nature gravitates to the dark side in my opinion. So, take charge of yourself and your words and find what is right. It can be a challenge but you will be better for it. Others will notice. You will be working on your legacy, your dash, and how you will be remembered.

All of the world's major religions encourage us to transform our thoughts and emotions in order to foster awakening to the sacred. Confucius said, "If I had to take one phrase to cover all my teaching, I would say, "Let there be no evil in your thoughts." Buddha espoused, "Dwelling on your brother's faults multiplies your own." Mohammed proclaimed, "Who do you imagine to be strong or powerful? It is he who masters himself when angry." There is a Jewish prayer which reads, "As we recall the compassion shown us by our parents, so may we dedicate ourselves to turning that compassion toward all the inhabitants of the earth."

An anonymous Christian text states:

Let us be still an instant, and forget  
all things we ever learned, all thoughts we had,  
and every preoccupation that we hold

of what things mean and what their purpose is.

Let us remember not our own ideas

of what the world is for.

We do not know . . .

Simply do this:

be still, and lay aside all thoughts

of what you are and what God is;

all concepts you have learned about the world;

all images you hold about yourself . . .

Do not bring with you one thought the past has taught,

nor one belief you ever learned before from anything.

Forget this world, forget this course.

and come with wholly empty hands unto your God.

I love the concept of emptying ourselves to the Divine. Letting go of our ideas of what should happen next. We must come with gratitude and trust in the Divine. Many of us get so tied up in trying to control outcomes. I have a 50% ability to even control my

terrier. But, in surrendering to the universe, we can choose to do what is right, avoid negativity, and awaken our hearts and minds.

Here is a prayer which is often attributed to Bishop Oscar Romero. Romero found that it gave him hope. He transformed from a entitled pastor to an advocate of the poor and dispossessed. Despite being assassinated while saying Mass, Romero's vision for a peaceful El Salvador continues. His legacy endures.

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,

it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction

of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying

that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

no prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted,

knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation

in realizing that. This enables us to do something,

and to do it very well. It may be incomplete,

but it is a beginning, a step along the way,

an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference

between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

Amen

We remember all those who have died and we hold them in our hearts. We draw on their lives as an example of how we ourselves hope to be remembered. We practice gratitude, develop awareness, and avoid negativity as a sign of our desire to become the people we are all called to be.