

ALL SOULS CHURCH, UNITARIAN
Covenant Group Theme Guide, May 2017

LOSS

1 What is essential does not die, it clarifies. **Thornton Wilder**

2 An animal with a foot in a trap does not seem to despair. It is too busy trying to survive. It is all closed into a kind of still, intense waiting. Is this a key? Keep busy with survival. Imitate the trees. Learn to lose in order to recover, and remember that nothing stays the same for long, not even pain, psychic pain. Sit it out. Let it all pass. Let it go.
May Sarton, *Journal of a Solitude*

3 In search of my mother's garden, I found my own. **Alice Walker**

4 On the Fifth Day

On the fifth day
the scientists who studied the rivers
were forbidden to speak
or to study the rivers.

The scientists who studied the air
were told not to speak of the air,
and the ones who worked for the farmers
were silenced,
and the ones who worked for the bees.

Someone, from deep in the Badlands,
began posting facts.

The facts were told not to speak
and were taken away.
The facts, surprised to be taken, were silent.

Now it was only the rivers
that spoke of the rivers,
and only the wind that spoke of its bees,
while the unpausing factual buds of the fruit trees
continued to move toward their fruit.

The silence spoke loudly of silence,
and the rivers kept speaking,
of rivers, of boulders and air.

In gravity, earless and tongueless,
the untested rivers kept speaking.
Bus drivers, shelf stockers,
code writers, machinists, accountants,
lab techs, cellists kept speaking.

They spoke, the fifth day,
of silence.

Jane Hirshfield, in The Washington Post

Making Meaning of Loss

5 When a child is born, friends get married, a parent dies, people revolt, or a nation starves, it's not enough just to know about these things and to celebrate, grieve, or respond as best we can. We have to keep asking ourselves: "What does it all mean? What is God trying to tell us? How are we called to live in the midst of all this?" Without such questions our lives become numb and flat. **Henri J.M. Nouwen**

6 The mysteries and quandaries of death ask their recurrent questions: Is there life beyond? Do we know one another in a personal way? Do we know ourselves? Do we become part of some great cosmic energy? **Martha Whitmore Hickman, Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working with Grief**

7 Don't grieve.
Anything you lose comes round in another form.
The child weaned from mother's milk
Now drinks wine and honey mixed.
--Kabir

8 We tend to treat a health breakdown the way we treat a car breakdown, by taking our body in for repairs. . . . Illness shows us some of our vulnerabilities and dependencies, causing us to ask what reality must be like if this is happening. The vulnerabilities of illness are tied up with loss and grieving. Illness, like other losses, indicates to us that

our sense of self is too limited and our life plan must be rethought. Part of that rethinking consists of trying to make sense of getting sick. **Carol Ochs, *Song of the Self***

9 **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” —Matthew 5:4**

From a wisdom perspective, this second Beatitude is talking about vulnerability and flow.

When we mourn (not to be confused with complaining or self-pity) we are in a state of freefall, our heart reaching out toward what we have seemingly lost but cannot help loving anyway. To mourn is by definition to live between the realms. “Practice the wound of love,” writes Ken Wilber in *Grace and Grit*, his gripping personal story of loss and transformation. “Real love hurts; real love makes you totally vulnerable and open; real love will take you far beyond yourself; and therefore real love will devastate you.”

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Mourning is indeed a brutal form of emptiness. But in this emptiness, if we can remain open, we discover that a mysterious “something” does indeed reach back to comfort us; the tendrils of our grief trailing out into the unknown become intertwined in a greater love that holds all things together. To mourn is to touch directly the substance of divine compassion. And just as ice must melt before it can begin to flow, we, too, must become liquid before we can flow into the larger mind. Tears have been a classic spiritual way of doing this.

Cynthia Bourgeault, writing about the Beatitudes for the Daily Meditations online for The Center of Action and Contemplation

Accommodating Loss

10 One of my lungs is half gone, and the other half, because I smoked for years, has a lesion. So I can't swim anymore and had the swimming pool covered over. Now it's what I call the dance pavilion, and so I and my friends sit out and put music on and watch people dance. **Maya Angelou**

11 Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. **Susan Sontag**

12 The cycle of grief has its own timetable. Until that cycle is honored and completed we are moving along life's path with an anchor down. **Ann Linnea**

13 Tears lead us from loss to change. Otherwise, we may cling to a past dead beyond recall. Tears give life to the grief of endings, give them dignity and give them honor. What was, was good. What is to come is mystery. Once the tears have been shed that mark the loss, then the changes can be made that mark the new beginning. Tears give presence and power to both in life. Without tears, change may never come because the loss may never be acknowledged. **Joan Chittister, *There Is a Season***

For Reflection and Discussion

A What losses are weighing on you? What helps, consoles, comforts? What questions are you asking about this loss/these losses?

B What do you think of the idea that what we lose comes back in some other form? Has that been true in your life?

C What do you think of the Thornton Wilder's statement that "what is essential does not die, it clarifies?"

D How does your experience at AS help you deal with loss--perhaps to make sense of it or to cope in some way? Does lighting a candle help, or maybe it's the sermon, the music, the community, the silence or chanting at Vespers?

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