

Well, the inscription in the book of prayers that sits on my desk by the late A. Powell Davies, who was once a minister of All Souls Church in Washington, D.C., says, "And now for Daniel, as I retire, Reverend Carl Scovel." Carl spent 32 years preaching and praying at King's Chapel in Boston. He retired as I came on to assist him in his transition, a green and eager new minister to help that transition. And he gave me this little book of prayers, underlined, bracketed, notes in the margins, the binding falling apart.

You see, Davies and Carl were great preachers and excellent prayers, and I have turned to this book often. Davies devotes two pages to Memorial Day, but none to All Souls' Day despite serving a church of the same name. In the Memorial Day page, he prays, "They gave us tomorrow, the tomorrow they themselves would not return to share." Wise words, helpful words for today.

But it is in the section titled The Darkened Hours that I have spent most of my time in this book. There I find prayers of lament, prayers calling out for God to shine light where the soul hurts, prayers of loss, and prayers of grief. He prays in that book and that section, lines like this, "Whatever we have known and loved is ours while life shall last." His prayers urge us to remember well. He says, "Help us to see, oh, God, that what we love becomes part of us, interfused with our lives, blended with mind and memory joined to our souls."

You see, I don't think he needs a section for All Souls in his book. Every day must have been All Souls' Day for him. "Strengthen us in resolve that the good we knew in those who have passed from us shall live on in ourselves," he writes, "and be passed from one generation to another, immortal both with God and men."

Davies knew something about loss and grief and losing someone you love, as he would. He left his home in Wales to come to America to be a minister on the eastern shore. He served churches in Maine and New Jersey and then Washington, D.C. He once worked as a used car salesman for a

week in order to investigate the question of whether or not it is possible to be a businessman and adhere to Christian honesty and integrity. He wrote a strong critique of the prevailing businesses practice after that, but he was a Unitarian minister, you see. He was a minister who fought for integration in Washington in 1944 and against the McCarthy hearings on un-American activity. He dedicated his activism against McCarthyism and racial segregation. And in the end, he ignored his physician's advice to restrict his movements, as they used to say. He worked through severe discomfort and pain in his legs and his back, and on September 26, 1957, at just 55 years old, a blood clot traveled to his lung and killed him in a fatal pulmonary hemorrhage.

Davies knew loss, not because he moved here from Wales or served churches in New Jersey. I'm from New Jersey. I could say that. Yeah, I'd say that's... He knew loss because he was a minister and his ministry was always filled with life and death. I am guessing he had to fight some demons in his life. After reading many of his prayers, the hints of the darkest hours where God is asked to melt away sorrow and bitterness, I can see the demons in his office. I can see that he understood that in life there is loss, not in his words alone, but in the entirety of his ministry. Can you imagine fighting for integration in 1944?

So his words now sit on my desk and I get to spend time with those prayers talking to A. Powell Davies and to God about such things as loss and death. And don't worry, I'm okay. It's just par for the course being a minister, and I knew what I was getting into all those years back.

The spotlight on life and death and memory and all that is in A. Powell Davies's book is also a spotlight of ministry and the church and our lives, if we're honest. It's why we have All Souls' Day, why we honor those who are gone. We try to remember them with photos and with their names and with being together intentionally to answer the call from the payphone in the underworld, like the poem says. I don't know about you, but that poem really struck me. Justin Hamm's poem, Payphones in the Underworld, struck a chord in me because I get those calls all the time. I don't think I'm the only one. Not only in the stories or in the photos of my loved ones gone, but in an open book that falls to words that they said, in the sway of the flowers that were planted in the garden under the apple tree where my father and his parents were buried, in the sound of someone calling down the street that sounds like someone I might've known, in the tying of this tie that my father gave me or holding a recipe my grandmother wrote.

More than that, what those moments call me to, especially in those accidental moments when you touch the phone number on your contact list and it calls the person who's dead and some lady speaks a different language picks up and you don't know what to do, or the words that come out of your own mouth that you know aren't yours that you inherited from a parent or a loved one and you say them anyway, that's when those calls from the underworld come, those memories flood in, and they keep coming and I hope they do.

"The time for reminder has ripened," the poet says, ripens more and more each day we pay attention. And the famous writer, Anne Lamott said of this, she said, "They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up, and you come through, you learn to dance with a limp." That limp is why we're here today. It's why we brought photos. It's why we want to remember even when it hurts because no one gets out of here without loss. No one gets out of here without

ripening memories of loves that we carried, calls we receive. And today is the day in the church when we acknowledge all that.

There's this beautiful Buddhist story I love. You may have heard it before. I don't think I've ever told it. I don't know if you guys have. It's about a woman in a village that after her young child dies, she carries the body from house to house begging for a cure. She eventually goes to the Buddha and he promises to give her medicine if she can bring him a handful of mustard seeds, but they have to come from a home where no one has any grief, where no one has ever died. And so she goes to every home in the village and every family tells her they have lost a parent and a spouse and a child and a friend, and realizing that death is a universal part of life and that she was not alone in her sorrow, her paralyzing grief is transformed into peace, and she lays her child to rest and chooses to follow the Buddha and the Path of Awakening.

The reason I tell you that story is that if there are stories from the Buddha about this from a time that dates back before Jesus and the Bible, we know that humans have been doing what we are doing today for a very long time. We know that no one gets to forget the dead because we carry them in us. Even when we bury them, we hold their memories. These stories remind us that we can let loss and pain define who we are or we can celebrate them and try to remember what they left with us. And that is what today is all about, celebrating lives that touched ours despite the dark hours, lives that made ours, lives that are only alive in us. We remember when they made us smile or laugh. We remember the touch and the smell and the embrace and all that is good. We remember what they meant in the world.

That is the purpose of All Souls' Day in church, to receive the calls from the Payphone in the Underworld, to lift up the lives we knew and loved. And as A. Powell Davies writes in his dark hours pages, "Help me, oh, God, to be guided by the insights of the past. Let not bereavement blind me to what is good and lovely still. Let me see it through my tears." This is what All Souls' Day is in church where we ritualize our love, not in memory and prayer alone, but in holding one another gently. This is what All Souls' Day is in church.

Reverend Dr. Howard Thurman writes, "Again and again, it comes; a season of remembrance. Forgotten treasures of dreams reclaim their place; long-lost memories come trooping back to me. This is my season of remembrance, my time of recollection. Into the challenge of my anguish, I throw the strength of all my hope; I match the darts of my despair with the treasures of my dreams; upon the current of my heart I float the burdens of the years; I challenge the mind of death with my love of life."

And so friends, I say to you today in this season of remembrance that we belong to something bigger than we perceive. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have gone and are making this beautiful human tapestry of love and faith up here in front of the church, reminds us that we can only sever those connections if we forget them. And we may forget them if we forget that we belong to them. We must remember that we are woven into others' lives, that we are shaped by teachers who are no longer here, grandparents whose stories we barely recall, friends whose influence continues long after their voices have fallen silent, family members who loved us into being. We are held within a great communion of memory and affection, a cloud of witnesses stretching beyond our sight, but not beyond our reach.

So we today act to commit a memory. We commit an act of memory. It is an act of resistance to the disease of disconnection and spiritual loneliness and loss of faith. Our collective joy and pain puts us in the position to be in communion with each other and with the dead. My Unitarian colleague Richard Gilbert wrote, "We belong to a great community of all souls, a long procession of humanity, stretching back in time beyond our comprehension, sharing life with us. We are privileged to be part of those who have marveled at the miracle of birth, who have found meaning in the midst of life, and who stand humbly before the mystery of death. We belong to a great community of souls. It is our privilege to be part of it, to stand humbly and to be counted."

And so as we do each year, we invite you to tread lightly on the human path of life and death, loss and love and loneliness and despair and hope, and to see each other here, to see a community of souls who stare back at us from these photos, our family and our friends, companions on this journey, and to hold one another in this fragile experiment we call life.