

# Covenant Program #3: Death

## Light Candle:

We need to fear not death, but life-  
empty lives,  
loveless lives,  
lives that do not build upon the  
gifts that each of us have been given, lives that  
are like living deaths, lives in which we never  
pause to breathe deeply.

What we need to fear is not death, but  
squandering the lives we have been  
miraculously given.

-Mark Morrison-Reed

**Check In:** “How goes it with your spirit?”

**Opening Reading:** “When Death Comes”

By Mary Oliver

When death comes  
Like the hungry bear in autumn;  
When death comes and takes all the bright  
coins from his purse  
To buy me, and snaps the purse shut;  
When death comes  
Like the measles-pox;  
When death comes  
Like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,  
I want to step through the door full of curiosity,  
wondering:  
What is it going to be like, that cottage of  
darkness?  
And therefore I look upon everything  
As a brotherhood and a sisterhood,  
And I look upon time as no more than an idea,  
And I consider eternity as another possibility,  
And I think of each life as a flower, as common  
As a field daisy, and as singular,  
And each name a comfortable music in the  
mouth,  
Tending, as all music does, toward silence,  
And each body a lion of courage, and  
something  
Precious to the earth.

When it's over, I want to say: all my life  
I was a bride married to amazement.  
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my  
arms.  
When it's over, I don't want to wonder if I have  
made of my life something particular, and real.  
I don't want to find myself sighing and  
frightened,  
Or full of argument.  
I don't want to end up simply having visited  
this world.

## Reflection Questions:

- What are your first responses to this poem?
- When have you been a “bride,” “married to amazement,” taking the world in your arms?
- When have you felt like you were simply visiting the world? (ie, not engaged or able to engage in the world or your life.) When have grief and loss overpowered you?
- What keeps you “sighing and frightened and full of argument?” What weighs heavily on your heart?
- Have you been there when others have “stepped through the door?” How have you made sense of that? What feelings remain?
- As you imagine your own death, what would you like to see when you look back over you life? What kind of father/mother/partner/human being would you like to be remembered as?
- If this is a difficult topic (death), what is being stirred up?
- What does it mean, for you, to simply “visit the world?”

## Closing Activity:

Ethical Will: An ethical will is wisdom that you'd like to leave for friends, family, and people you love. Rather than a regular will, which leaves property to people, an “ethical will” leaves your wisdom about living – it's

your thoughts on what you think is important in life. It's what you think how to live a good life. Take 5-10 minutes to write out your "ethical will" and then share it with the group.

**Check Out:** Share a word or sentence about what you are leaving with...or share a word of appreciation with someone who said something that you found meaningful.

## **Business**

### **Closing:**

...I would like to beg you...to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.

-Rainer Maria Rilke

## **Extinguish Candle**