

Readings

Prayers

Music

Used at a service of Commemoration  
and Thanksgiving for the departed.  
St Helen's Church, November 1st 2008

From "The Song of Solomon"

Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon  
thy arm,

for Love is strong as death. *ch 8 v 6*

I sat down under his shadow with great delight  
and his

fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the  
banqueting house and his banner over me was love.

*ch 2 v 3*

### From "In the Springtime of the Year by Susan Hill

Susan Hill takes as her theme the effect on a happily married country girl of the sudden accidental death of her husband while felling a tree. It traces her slow agonized journey back through numbness and despair, her return to life and to a resurrection of the spirit. There is one passage in the book in which she goes to see a friend of her husband's who had witnessed the accident. As she enters his garden the smell of a bonfire suddenly brings back memories of their life together .

A line of Smoke, pencil thin, streamed up into the air over the top of the hedge, and as she drew nearer the gate, the scent of it pricked in her nostrils, and abruptly she felt herself swung back hard into the past, and an evening last autumn when Ben had made a bonfire and it had gusted up at him, filming his face and hair and bare arms with ash. Oh, she thought, Oh this is how it is. It's the small things. The bonfire in the evening. this is what makes it so hard to bear. For what she missed now was not passion or important deeds, significant words, but the routine of eating, everyday life, eating, and work and sleep, talk of this and that, and the sounds of footsteps about the house, the smell of wet boots on the step. Nothing could replace all this, nothing, though she might live for ever. It was not vows and fleshly love and the bearing of children that she wanted, it was so much less - and so much more.

The poet John Tessimond, was always seeking, but alas never found, the true companion who in one of his poems he just called "She."

No more time or place  
Once I see her face  
Sorrow, doubt and fear  
Leave when she is near.  
Warm, her eyes and hand  
Wordless understand.  
She, although away  
Stays with me all day.  
In, below, behind,  
Blood and heart and mind.  
She is where I go  
She is all I know.  
Goal and map, to her  
All experience,  
Feeling, thought and sense.  
Each discovery  
Is a prize to be  
shown to her one day  
Something I can lay  
Proud before her feet;  
Something to repeat.  
New discovered door  
we may find once more.  
Every day's begun  
Charted by her sun  
All I shall not share  
who knows when or where  
With her, and retaste  
By her side, is waste.

### Since We Loved

Since we loved the earth (that shook  
As we kissed) fresh beauty took  
Love hath been as poet's paint  
Life as heaven is to a saint  
All my joys my hope excel  
All my work hath prospered well  
All my songs have happy been  
Oh my love, my life, my queen.

*Words : Robert Bridges*

*Music Gerald Finzi*

*Sung by Ian Bosridge*

Helen Thomas, wife of the poet Edward Thomas who was killed in France in 1916, was married to him for 17 years, bore him three children and shared with him times of supreme happiness and times of the most bitter estrangement. She outlived him by fifty years and after her own time of numbness and despair found solace and peace of mind in writing her recollections of their time together.

We cannot say why we love people.

There is no reason for passionate love. But the quality in him that I most admired was his sincerity. There was never any pretence between us. All was open and true. All was known, all was suffered and endured. And afterwards there was no reserve in our joy.

If we love deeply we must also suffer deeply, for the price of the capacity of ecstatic joy is anguish. And so it was. with us to the end. During our life there had been many bitter partings and many joyous homecomings.

The bitterness of the partings has faded in my consciousness but the memory of the joy and hope and happiness at the reunions has stayed with me. And for ever, so it seems to me, part of me will stand at the gate and listen for his step.

*Helen Thomas - World Without End*

In his book, *The Initials in the Heart*, Laurence Whistler tells of his marriage to Jill Furse which ended after five years of almost complete happiness, despite the separations of war, when she died after the birth of their second child. They were married very quietly in Salisbury Cathedral as the war started, and he describes his feelings as they repeat in turn the timeless words of the marriage service.

It was both strange and moving to address by name the person one loved and already knew better than anyone else, and formally say what one actually meant. The word 'death', our death, passed between us twice. Anywhere else this would have been inopportune, but couples are made by the church to face the ending of their time together before it has fully begin. Death kneels between them. And we accepted him, and were nearer at that moment than ever again, to the funeral that only one of us could attend.

Deare Sir,

I am in some little disorder by reason of the death of a little child of mine, a boy that lately made us very glad. But now he rejoices in his little orbe while we think and sigh and long to be as safe as he is.

*Jeremy Taylor in a letter to John Evelyn*

*July 19th 1656*

*The Initials in the Heart, Laurence Whistler*

## A CHILD LOANED

"I'll lend for you a little time  
A child of Mine", He said.  
"For you to love the while he lives  
And mourn for when he's dead.  
It may be six or seven years  
Or twenty-two or three,  
But will you, till I call him back,  
Take care of him for Me?  
He'll bring his charms to gladden you,  
And should his stay be brief,  
You'll have his lovely memories  
As solace for your grief.

I cannot promise he will stay,  
Since all from Earth return,  
But there are lessons taught down there  
I want this child to learn.  
I've looked this wide world over  
In My search for teachers true,  
And from the throngs that crowd life's lanes  
I have selected you.  
Now will you give him all your love,  
Nor think the labour vain,  
Nor hate Me when I come to call  
And take him back again?"

I fancied that I heard them say,  
"Dear Lord, Thy will be done,  
For all the joy Thy child shall bring,  
For the risk of grief we'll run.  
We'll shelter him with tenderness,  
We'll love him while we may,  
And for the happiness we've known,  
Forever grateful stay.  
But should the angels call for him  
Much sooner than we planned,  
We'll brave the bitter grief that comes  
And try to understand"

Edward A Guest

# Not yet my Mother

Yesterday I found a photo  
of you at seventeen,  
holding a horse and smiling,  
not yet my mother.

The tight riding hat hid your hair,  
and your legs were still the long shins of a boy's.  
You held the horse by the halter,  
your hand a fist under its huge jaw.

The blown trees were still in the background  
and the sky was grained by the old film stock,  
but what caught me was your face,  
which was mine.

And I thought, just for a second, that you were me.  
But then I saw the woman's jacket,  
nipped at the waist, the ballooned jodhpurs,  
and of course the date, scratched in the corner.

All of which told me again,  
that this was you at seventeen, holding a horse  
and smiling, not yet my mother,  
Although I was clearly already your child.

Owen Shears

Take one fresh and tender kiss  
Add one stolen night of bliss  
One girl, one boy  
Some grief, some joy  
Memories are made of this

*Sung by Dean Martin*

Henry King, who was bishop of Chichester in the early seventeenth century, wrote a poem in memory of his wife who had died before him. Except for these who believe that death closes all, this does provide a kind of answer.

Sleep on, my love, in thy cold bed  
Never to be disquieted!  
My last good night: Thou wilt not wake  
Till I thy fate shall overtake;  
Till age or grief or sickness, must  
Marry my body to that dust  
It so much loves; and fill the room  
My heart keeps empty in thy tomb.  
Stay for me there. I am content to live  
Divided, with but half a heart,  
Till we shall meet and never part.

*Exequyon his Wife*

When you walk through a storm  
Hold your head up high  
And don't be afraid of the dark  
At the end of the storm  
Is a golden sky  
And the sweet silver song of a lark

Walk on through the wind  
Walk on through the rain  
Tho' your dreams be tossed and blown  
Walk on, walk on  
With hope in your heart  
And you'll never walk alone  
You'll never walk alone

*Words - Oscar Hammerstein*

*Music - Richard Rodgers*

*Sung by Katharine Jenkins*

Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the house and gate of heaven, to enter into that gate and dwell in that house where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light; no noise nor silence, but one equal music; no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession; no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity in the habitations of your glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen

*John Donne*

O LORD our God, from whom neither life nor death can separate those who trust in thy love, and whose love holds in its embrace thy children in this world and the next, so unite us to thyself that in fellowship with thee we may always be united to our loved ones, whether here or there.

Give us courage, constancy and hope, through him who died and was buried and rose again for us even Jesus Christ our Lord.

O Lord support us all the day long of this troublous life, until the shades lengthen and the evening come, the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over and our work is done. Then Lord in thy mercy, grant us a safe lodging, a holy rest and peace at the last, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*John Henry, Cardinal Newman*

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,  
Whose trust, ever child-like, no cares could destroy,  
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,  
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,  
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,  
Be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,  
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,  
Your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,  
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,  
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,  
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,  
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,  
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

*Words - Jan Struther*  
*Music - "Slane" traditional*