

Poems Suitable For Funerals

We hope that you will find this list of poems both inspiring and comforting.

If you need any further guidance with the structure of a funeral service, please visit:
www.berwickchurch.org.uk/funerals.html.

Song: When I am Dead

When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress tree:
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet;
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not feel the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sing on, as if in pain:
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise nor set,
Haply I may remember,
And haply may forget.

By Christina Rossetti

Do Not Stand At My Grave and Weep

Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow.
I am the sun on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there; I did not die.

By Mary Elizabeth Frye

He Wishes For the Cloths of Heaven

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

By W. B. Yeats

Not In Vain

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain:
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.

By Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) Amherst, Massachusetts

Death, Be Not Proud

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not soe,
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,
And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,
And better then thy stroake; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

By John Donne

In Memory

Serene and beautiful and very wise,
Most erudite in curious Grecian lore,
You lay and read your learned books, and bore
A weight of unshed tears and silent sighs.
The song within your heart could never rise
Until love bade it spread its wings and soar.
Nor could you look on Beauty's face before
A poet's burning mouth had touched your eyes.
Love is made out of ecstasy and wonder;
Love is a poignant and accustomed pain.
It is a burst of Heaven-shaking thunder;
It is a linnet's fluting after rain.
Love's voice is through your song;
above and under
And in each note to echo and remain
A red rose is His Sacred Heart,
a white rose is His face,
And His breath has turned the barren
world to a rich and flowery place.
He is the Rose of Sharon,
His gardener am I,
And I shall drink His fragrance
in Heaven when I die.

By (Alfred) Joyce Kilmer

Remember

Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you planned:
Only remember me; you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than you should remember and be sad.

By Christina Rossetti

To Sleep

O soft embalmer of the still midnight,
Shutting, with careful
fingers and benign,
Our gloom-pleas'd eyes,
embower'd from the light,
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine:
O soothest Sleep! if so it please thee, close
In midst of this thine hymn my willing eyes,
Or wait the "Amen," ere thy poppy throws
Around my bed its lulling charities.
Then save me, or the passed day will shine
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes, -
Save me from curious Conscience,
that still lords
Its strength for darkness,
burrowing like a mole;
Turn the key deftly
in the oiled wards,
And seal the hushed
Casket of my Soul.

By John Keats

Of Death

Then Almitra spoke, saying, "We would ask now of Death."

And he said:

You would know the secret of death.

But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life?

The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the mystery of light.

If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life.

For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.

In the depth of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond;

And like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring.

Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity.

Your fear of death is but the trembling of the shepherd when he stands before the king whose hand is to be laid upon him in honour.

Is the shepherd not joyful beneath his trembling, that he shall wear the mark of the king?

Yet is he not more mindful of his trembling?

For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?

And what is to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.

And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb.

And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.

By Kahlil Gibran

Of Joy and Sorrow

Then a woman said, "Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow."

And he answered:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain. .

Is not the cup that hold your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow," and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater." But I say unto you, they are inseparable.

Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy.

Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced.

When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall.

By Kahlil Gibran

Death Is Nothing At All

Death is nothing at all.
I have only slipped away into the next room.
I am I, and you are you.
Whatever we were to each other,
That we are still.
Call me by my old familiar name,
Speak to me in the easy way you always used.
Put no difference into your tone,
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.
Laugh as we always laughed
At the little jokes we always enjoyed together.
Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.
Let my name be ever the household word that it always was;
Let it be spoken without effort,
Without the ghost of a shadow in it.
Life means all that it ever meant;
It is the same as it ever was;
There is absolute unbroken continuity.
What is death but a negligible accident?
Why should I be out of mind
Because I am out of sight?
I am waiting for you, for an interval,
Somewhere very near,
Just around the corner.
All is well.
Nothing is past; nothing is lost.
One brief moment and all will be as it was before.
How we shall laugh at the trouble of parting when we meet again!

By Canon Henry Scott-Holland

Farewell

Farewell to thee! but not farewell
To all my fondest thoughts of thee:
Within my heart they still shall dwell;
And they shall cheer and comfort me.

O beautiful, and full of grace!
If thou hadst never met mine eye,
I had not dreamed a living face
Could fancied charms so far outvie.

If I may ne'er behold again
That form and face so dear to me,
Nor hear thy voice, still would I fain
Preserve, for aye, their memory.

That voice, the magic of whose tone
Can wake an echo in my breast,
Creating feelings that, alone,
Can make my tranced spirit blest.

That laughing eye, whose sunny beam
My memory would not cherish less; -

And oh, that smile! whose joyous gleam
Nor mortal language can express.

Adieu, but let me cherish, still,
The hope with which I cannot part.
Contempt may wound and coldness chill,
But still it lingers in my heart.

And who can tell but Heaven, at last,
May answer all my thousand prayers,
And bid the future pay the past
With joy for anguish, smiles for tears?

By Anne Bronte

Child of Mine

"I'll lend you for a little time a child of Mine," He said,
" For you to love 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 shall 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 the 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, not think the labour vain,
Nor hate Me when I come to call to 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, 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 shall the angels call for him much sooner than we've planned,
We'll brave the bitter grief that comes and try to understand.

Anonymous

I Am Standing Upon the Seashore

I am standing upon the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength. I stand and watch her until at length she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and sky come to mingle with each other.

Then some one at my side says: 'There, she is gone!'

'Gone where?'

Gone from my sight. That is all. She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side and she is just as able to bear her load of living freight to her destined port.

Her diminished size is in me, not in her. And just at the moment when some one at my side says: 'There, she is gone!' there are other eyes watching her coming, and other voices ready to take up the glad shout: 'Here she comes!' And that is dying.

By Henry Van Dyke

Requiem

Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you gave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.

By Robert Louis Stevenson

Turn Again to Life

If I should die and leave you here a while,
Be not like others, sore undone, who keep
Long vigil by the silent dust and weep.
For my sake turn again to life and smile,
Nerving thy heart and trembling hand to do
That which will comfort other souls than thine;
Complete these dear unfinished tasks of mine,
And I, perchance, may therein comfort you.

By Mary Lee Hall

Songs of the Death of Children (Kindertotenlieder)

You must not shut the night inside you,
But endlessly in light the dark immerse.
A tiny lamp has gone out in my tent –
I bless the flame that warms the universe.

By Friedrich Rückert

To Those I Love

If I should ever leave you whom I love
To go along the Silent Way,
grieve not,
Nor speak of me with tears,
but laugh and talk
of me as if I were beside you there.

(I'd come-I'd come, could I but find a way!
But would not tears and grief be barriers?)

And when you hear a song or
see a bird I loved,
please do not let the thought of me be sad...
For I am loving you just as I always have...

You were so good to me!
There are so many things I wanted still
to do—so many things to say to you...
Remember that I did not fear—
It was just leaving you that was so hard to face...

We cannot see Beyond...
But this I know:
I loved you so -
'twas heaven here with you!

By Isla Paschal Richardson

Sonnet XXX

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear times' waste;
Then can I drown an eye, unus'd to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,
And the moan the expense of many a vanish'd sight:
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoan'd moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restor'd and sorrows end.

By William Shakespeare

Fear No More The Heat O' The Sun

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages:
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Fear no more the frown o' the great,
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke:
Care no more to clothe and eat;
To thee the reed is as the oak:
The sceptre, learning, physic, must
All follow this, and come to dust.

Fear no more the lightning flash,
Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;
Fear no slander, censure rash;
Thou hast finished joy and moan:
All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee, and come to dust.

No exorciser harm thee!
Nor no witchcraft charm thee!
Ghost unlaid forbear thee!
Nothing ill come near thee!
Quiet consummation have:
And renowned be thy grave!

From Cymbeline (Act 4 Scene 2) by William Shakespeare

Darest Thou Now O Soul

Darest thou now O soul,
Walk out with me toward the unknown region,
Where neither ground is for the feet nor any path to follow?

No map there, nor guide,
Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand,
Nor face with blooming flesh, nor lips, nor eyes, are in that land.

I know it not O soul,
Nor dost thou, all is a blank before us,
All waits undream'd of in that region, that inaccessible land.

Till when the ties loosen,
All but the ties eternal, Time and Space,
Nor darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds bounding us.

Then we burst forth, we float,
In Time and Space O soul, prepared for them,
Equal, equipt at last, (O joy! O fruit of all!) them to fulfil O soul

By Walt Whitman

The Last Invocation

At the last, tenderly,
From the walls of the powerful fortress'd house,
From the clasp of the knitted locks, from the keep of the well-closed doors,
Let me be wafted.

Let me glide noiselessly forth;
With the key of softness unlock the locks – with a whisper,
Set ope the doors O soul.

Tenderly – be not impatient,
(Strong is your hold O mortal flesh,
Strong is your hold O love.)

By Walt Whitman

Good-bye My Fancy!

Good-bye my Fancy!
Farewell dear mate, dear love!
I'm going away, I know not where,
Or to what fortune, or whether I may ever see you again,
So Good-bye my Fancy.

Now for my last – let me look back a moment;
The slower fainter ticking of the clock is in me,
Exit, nightfall, and soon the heart-thud stopping.

Long have we lived, joy'd, carress'd together;
Delightful! – now separation – Good-bye my Fancy.

Yet let me not be too hasty,
Long indeed have we lived, slept, filter'd, become really blended into one;
Then if we die we die together, (Yes, we'll remain one,)
If we go anywhere we'll go together to meet what happens,
May-be we'll be better off and blither, and learn something,
May-be it is yourself now really ushering me to the true songs, (who knows?)
May-be it is you the mortal knob really undoing, turning – so now finally,
Good-bye – and hail! my Fancy.

By Walt Whitman

On His Own Death

Death stands above me, whispering low
I know not what into my ear:
Of his strange language all I know
Is, there is not a word of fear.

By Walter Savage Landor

Finis

I strove with none, for none was worth my strife.
Nature I loved and, next to Nature, Art:
I warm'd both hands before the fire of life;
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

By Walter Savage Landor

Song: Love Lives Beyond the Tomb

And earth, which fades like dew:
I love the fond,
The faithful, and the true.

Love lives in sleep:
'Tis happiness of healthy dreams:
Eve's dews may weep,
But love delightful seems.

'Tis seen in flowers,
And in the morning's pearly dew;
In earth's green hours,
And in the heaven's eternal blue.

'Tis heard in Spring
When light and sunbeams, warm and kind,
On angel's wing
Bring love and music to the mind.

And where's the voice,
So young, so beautiful, and sweet
As Nature's choice,
Where Spring and lovers meet?

Love lives beyond the tomb,
And earth, which fades like dew:
I love the fond,
The faithful, and the true.

By John Clare

Crossing the Bar

Sunset and evening star
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

By Alfred Lord Tennyson

Indian Prayer

When I am dead
Cry for me a little
Think of me sometimes
But not too much.
Think of me now and again
As I was in life
At some moments it's pleasant to recall
But not for long.
Leave me in peace
And I shall leave you in peace
And while you live
Let your thoughts be with the living.

Traditional

No Longer Mourn For Me

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell;
Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it, for I love you so
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then you should make you woe.
O if (I say) you look upon this verse,
When I, perhaps, compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
But let your love even with my life decay;
Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
And mock you with me after I am gone.

By William Shakespeare

Like As the Waves Make Towards the Pebbled Shore

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end,
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.
Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time, that gave, doth now his gift confound.
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow;
Feels on the rarities of nature's truth,
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.
And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

By William Shakespeare

Remember Me

To the living, I am gone
To the sorrowful, I will never return
To the angry, I was cheated
But to the happy, I am at peace
And to the faithful, I have never left
I cannot speak, but I can listen
I cannot be seen, but I can be heard
So as you stand upon the shore
Gazing at the beautiful sea, remember me
As you look in awe at a mighty forest
And in its grand majesty, remember me
Remember me in your hearts,
In your thoughts, and the memories of the
Times we loved, the times we cried,
the battle we fought and the times we laughed
For if you always think of me,
I will never have gone.

Anon

Farewell, Sweet Dust

Now I have lost you, I must scatter
All of you on the air henceforth;
Not that to me it can ever matter
But it's only fair to the rest of the earth.

Now especially, when it is winter
And the sun's not half as bright as it was,
Who wouldn't be glad to find a splinter
That once was you, in the frozen grass?

Snowflakes, too, will be softer feathered,
Clouds, perhaps, will be whiter plumed;
Rain, whose brilliance you caught and gathered,
Purer silver have resumed.

Farewell, sweet dust; I never was a miser:
Once, for a minute, I made you mine:
Now you are gone, I am none the wiser
But the leaves of the willow are as bright as wine.

By Elinor Wylie (1885-1928)

My Mother's Sleep Is Deep

My mother's sleep is deep as drifts of snow.
Snow-white the moon which plays with rays like fingers,
smooths and lingers on her white sheet. The slow
touch and flow is magic, stirring earth from night
towards day, from sleep to life. A tide sheering, soaking.
Currents below stroke, tug. Atoms disunite
in dark earth floating free; grains that sleep unseen
conjoin. My mother's bones are green blades rising
with the light. They will be snowdrops soon, snow-green

By Margaret Wilmot

Other possibilities:

But not forgotten by Dorothy Parker

Funeral Blues by W. H. Auden (Stop all the clocks..)

Four Quartets: East Coker, section V: "Home is where one starts from...in my end is my beginning." (Lines 190-209) by T. S. Eliot

Four Quartets: Burnt Norton, section V: "Words move, music moves...The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera". (Lines 137-158) by T. S. Eliot

The Golden Gate: "Are the dead, too, defiled by sorrow,.." by Vikram Seth

Dirge without music by Edna St. Vincent Millay

I am not resigned by Edna St. Vincent Millay

Do not go gentle into that good night by Dylan Thomas

And death shall have no dominion by Dylan Thomas

The Road Not Taken by Robert Lee Frost

What would the dead want from us from "Out of Danger" by James Fenton

Life goes on by Joyce Grenfell
Remember Me by David Harkins
Seaside Golf by Sir John Betjeman