

**“All Souls”**  
**November 3rd, 2019**  
**Rev. Laurel Gray**

In modern Irish, Sowen translates to summer’s end – it was a time for preparing for winter and taking stock of the year that had passed. The Celtic year is divided into two halves – the season of light and season of dark, with holidays marking those two transitions. Sowen, which fell on Halloween this year, falls between the autumn equinox and winter solstice. It is a recognition that cycles of death and birth are part of life.

In the Celtic tradition, it is believed that on this day, the veil between this world and the next thins, so we can feel closer to those who have left this world. Thus, it is part of pagan practice to make altars honoring those loved ones who have died, leaving out hot food and drink for them to enjoy. It is a way of calling back their memory, a moment to ask for their blessing or maybe their guidance.

It’s also believed that sometimes our ancestors cause mischief at this time of year, playing tricks on us – maybe some of you like to play pranks on your friends and relatives as a way of showing affection, too. Because of this belief that our ancestors might be playing tricks, it turned into a time when people would get mischievous, too, playing pranks on each other as part of the fun of the holiday.

And if this is all sounding familiar to trick or treating, you are exactly right. When the Roman empire took over Celtic land, they started adopting these pagan traditions as Christian traditions. Then in the year 609, which was a very long time ago, Pope Boniface IV declared the day

“All Saints’ Day” which was also commonly called All-Hallows. And today these traditions morphed into what we call Halloween.

But this is not a tradition exclusive to Celts – I suspect many of you, especially the youngest among us and your parents, have seen the Pixar movie Coco. It’s a beautiful film and it centers around Dia de Los Muertos – the Mexican day of the dead. In Coco, we see similar traditions of making altars to ancestors, putting out photos and flowers and food. It’s a way of honoring our loved ones who have died and keeping their memory alive in us.

Here at UUCSW we have our own way of doing this, which we’re going to do in a few moments. This is a ritual that the Rev. Cindy Frado developed when she was the minister here, and some of you requested that we revive this tradition. You’ll see that we have a tree up here by the pulpit and you received paper leaves when you came in. If you don’t have a leaf, or need more, please raise your hand and we’ll come around with leaves.

You’re invited to write the names of your loved ones who have died on a leaf and bring it up to hang on the tree. We’ll do this in silence as Kala plays the piano.

I invite you to settle into your remembering. Feel your love for that person, or people, or maybe pet, as you make your leaves and come forward. It’s possible that doing this will bring tears or sadness, sweet memories, a feeling of love and longing – all of those things are good to feel. I invite you to let yourself feel whatever it is that comes.

Take your time. Breathe and settle in. Come up when you’re ready.