

Based on a service, Samhain Family Worship, by Rebecca Kelley-Morgan

Welcome and good morning. One of the things we do together is watch the year change from season to season. Have you ever wondered why summer has to end? Or why winter doesn't stay forever? Lots of people have and some of them have made up stories about it. We'll talk about some today.

We are here together today to celebrate the holiday of Samhain, which comes from the Celtic people who once lived in northern Europe, Britain and Ireland. They were farmers and craftsmen and metal workers, warriors and poets and priests.

Life was hard, even for the wealthy, and it was often short. Who in this room is between 5 and 10? If you had lived three thousand years ago you would have been responsible for tending animals, gathering wood for the fires at the ironworks, and perhaps accompanying your chief into battle. Who in this room is between 10 and 15? If you had lived three thousand years ago, you would have been doing the work of an adult, mining, farming, fighting, and caring for a family of your own. By the middle of your teenage years, you would have been an adult. Now who in this room is over 30? You would have been considered very old by the standards of the time. Most people didn't live to be much older than that.

Living that way, the religion of the Celtic people was very concerned with life and death. And the year was divided into two parts: light and dark. The light time of the year, beginning in the spring, was the time of life, of crops and harvest. After the last harvest, people moved into what they called the dark time, when everything seemed to be dying and lifeless. And there was one day, the holy day of Samhain, when the great wheel of life shuddered and turned. This day was the time when people stopped between worlds, between light and dark, between life and death; the day they looked both backwards and forwards.

And what about us? What does this have to do with people who live in warm houses and can expect a long life? Samhain is still around, and people still celebrate it, even if they call it Halloween. The leaves are falling off the trees, the gardens are turning brown and dry, and the days are getting shorter.

Just like the people who lived all those years ago, our lives too are in a circle. Think of the year as a circle. Spring to summer, to fall, to winter, and back to spring again. It happens over and over again all through our lives. Think of yourself as part of the circle. You wake up, you play or work, you sleep, you wake up again...and start all over. Think of life as a circle. Babies are born, grow up, grow old and die, and babies are born, grow old and die. It happens over and over again. You and you and you are all part of the circle as I am.

Because we are part of the circle of life, we know that endings are part of it, too. Close your eyes and think about a time when you were sad. How did that feel? Did it feel like a rainy day? Did it feel like a cold dark night? Did it feel like a time when nobody was around to give you a hug? Sadness is the other side of happiness. Both sadness and happiness are part of the circle.

At Samhain people let themselves be sad. We have lots of reasons to be sad. When a friend moves away, when you lose a job, when a mom or dad has to leave, when you leave a favorite school. But the saddest thing of all is when someone you love dies. Maybe your cat or dog, a friend's mom or dad, or one of your grandparents. We're sad because they made us happy when they were alive. We're sad because we miss them. We're sad because we loved them. So at Samhain we remember all of the people and animals who have lived and died, because as long as we can remember those we love, they are alive in our hearts and our minds.

Today we are here to remember. We have candles on the table. If you would like to light a candle in memory of a loved one, please come forward. If you form a line along this aisle, you can light a candle, use the microphone to tell us the loved one's name, and then go back to your seat.

(after everyone has finished) We remember today and we remember on other days. Because what is remembered...lives.

The wonderful thing about the circle is that it doesn't stop. It keeps going around and around and around. So even though the circle of life has endings, it also has beginnings. Although Samhain is the end of the summer, it is also the first day of the New Year. Everything becomes new today, everything starts again. Even with winter coming, we know that the seeds that fell off the plants are going to be new plants next spring. The tree branches are going to be covered in leaves again.

We aren't always sad. Happiness is a part of the circle, too. Close your eyes and think about a time when you were happy. Did it feel like a warm blanket wrapped around you? Did it feel like sitting in front of a fire? Did it feel like a hug from your mom or dad or best friend? Did it feel like spring? We can be thankful for feeling happy. I'd like us to play the alphabet game with things that we are thankful for. I need 26 people to come forward --- line up along that aisle. The first person in line gets to name something she or he is thankful for that starts with the letter A, the second person gets B, and so on.

We have lots to be thankful for. Thank you.

We live inside the circle, the circle of time, the circle of life. In the circle we are born, live, and pass from this world. In the circle we love and are loved. In the circle we have come here together to laugh and to cry with each other...our friends, our families, our beloved community. And because we have each other, no sadness is too much to bear, and no happiness is celebrated alone. In the circle I bid you peace and blessed be.