

OpenTopics | Grief, Death and Dying

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Evangelists, death, life curriculum, dying, experience, learning, fear, ministry, family, spirituality

SPEAKERS

Jane Gardner, Kris Judd, Blake Smith, Holly Nelson-Becker

Blake Smith 00:27

Hello, and welcome to Project Zion Podcast. I'm Blake Smith, Project Manager for Project Zion, and I'm really happy to get to introduce this special episode in our Open Topics series. In this episode on grief, ministry and ministry to the dying. You'll hear an interview that was originally recorded for the Order of Evangelists in Community of Christ. It features Community of Christ Presiding Evangelist, Jane Gardner, as well as Kris Judd, and special guest, Holly Nelson-Becker. We want to offer a special thanks to Jane, Kris, Holly, and the Order of Evangelists for allowing us to cross post this episode here on Project Zion Podcast. We hope you'll enjoy it and find it helpful in your own life and ministry. Here's Jane.

Jane Gardner 01:15

So welcome to the Order of Evangelists to this interview that we are very excited about. Holly Nelson is the way I knew our guest, when we were children together in the Chicago District, which neither one of us will own to how long ago that was. A long time ago. Holly and I have remained in contact over the years, and it's been a special privilege to watch her life and her ministry. And we are especially blessed to have her with us today, as she's going to talk to us about ministry with the dying, the topic we've been fairly focused on for the last year. So Holly, let's start. Tell us a little bit about yourself and how you ended up where you are. Well, maybe tell us where you are, and how you ended up where you are. And you're passion about this.

Holly Nelson-Becker 02:14

Okay, great. Well, where I am now is in Derby in the UK. And that's because about five years ago, I came over to England and have been working at Brunel University in London, as a professor of social work. So that's my background. And within social work, I'm a gerontologist. And within gerontology, a lot of my area of expertise has formed around spirituality, which has a lot of nice connections with our church faith. And also then end-of-life, which is slightly more recent than the spirituality part has been with me, really, since the late 80s. Or so when I was working with clinically with older adults who were in nursing care facilities. And I began to understand that a lot of the issues they brought me, that they were most concerned about, wasn't their depression wasn't their anxiety, but was their concern about where their children were now why they no longer talk to them. You know, how God could allow them to have this new disease or illness, all these things that I thought were more spiritual questions. And actually, from there, I went on to University of Chicago and got my Doctorate, and that was in the late 90s. But I wanted to say that parts of this story about myself, which I'll try and keep truncated, it's not

going to be told chronologically. And it's not a straight-line story, as I think for a number of you also, your stories haven't followed in a straight line. And for me, it's, you know, when Jane and I were kids back in Chicago, if someone had told me that I was going to end up being a professor, I would have said they were crazy, because I did not at all see that in myself at that point in my life, nor even for many years later, so nor did my husband. So it's a complete surprise to him, I'm sure when this became my my final career choice. But you know, the part of that story is in jobs that I almost took, and then something happened to send me on a different path. And I guess I should say that my background, my first career was with the airlines and that was because of languages which I had at Graceland College. It was French, German and a little bit of Japanese, but I was never fluent in Japanese. So from there, I had this when I was the last few years of working with the airlines. I was working as a flight attendant and I went down to South America. And I had this pivotal moment of incongruity where I was in this beautiful, beautiful hotel room, and I was looking out on the balcony across to the mountain where there were just the shacks and hovels. And I was like, wow, you know, here I am in this wonderful place, and they their lives are so much more difficult than my own. And that disparity really bothered me, and I recognized that I needed to go about making a change. So that's when I went back and got my master's in social work, which was in the mid 80s. Interestingly, you know, I was thinking, Jane about our common background and how, you know, that church in Chicago, you might have your family might have come a few years later, I don't remember we were both still young, but it started in the 50s. And then 60 years later, it's now gone. So you and I are sold, I mean, so you and I are like the repositories of those memories. And we carry on the value of what we learned there. And so I think that is like that with life that we carry on everything that we've learned with us. And that becomes a part of who we are. So, when I was at the university, I focused on gerontology. And I have to say, a part of that when I got my clinical job. I remember being asked, Why do you want to work with older people, you know, sometimes they can be cranky, and, you know, not recognize them all of this? And I said, Well, I was trying to think on the spot, you know, I hadn't thought that they would ask me that question. And I said, Well, I love my grandparents. And so I got the position and sort of think it was that that I said, but it could have been other things. And both of my grandparents came from Iowa, and my mother's family were members of our faith community, then the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. And my dad's family wasn't. And my dad tells the story that he stood out to prove that my mother was wrong in her faith. And he ended up joining the church. And later he became a High Priest, and later still, an Evangelist, who I think Jamie knew him in that way, as well. So I felt like I always had a good foundation in spirituality and in religion. When I went to university to study aging, and spirituality, which was I found out later, you know, this sort of not the place to go to study there. But right, so, but I was able to take a number of courses from the Divinity School there at the university that became my other areas specialty alongside social work. So I actually did learn a lot that broadened a lot of my thinking and my understanding. And so I think that way, that was very good. So sorry, was one of I was told later, I was one of two students that year in social work getting their doctorate in gerontology. So it's a small number. Still, today, it's a concern that we don't have enough people with the knowledge to work with older folks. But I always felt comfortable with death. And I haven't really looked closely as to the reasons why I think it's just an intuitive knowing. But I did have some clients that had some very difficult losses around grief and around death and dying and so I think working with them also gave me the background. So when I was I taught for a while the University of Kansas, which actually I just loved. That was probably my favorite place to teach. I was there for nine years. And while I was there, I did a study of hospice. And that was really eye opening for me. And shortly after that study finished, I was

asked to lead a support group for Midland hospice, which is in Topeka, and Ottawa, Kansas. And that support group was really to give staff an opportunity to sort of debrief from some of the difficult experiences they had. And while I was doing that, I became aware that I was developing an implicit spiritual curriculum for them. So I would come each week with something, some thoughts or some, you know, some ideas to talk about, and they would also have their own and we would often, you know, go one way or another, but afterwards, they looked at it with like, wow, you know, this is quite interesting. So I think that also helped me in this area. Then later, I was invited to be part of a project to improve spiritual care and palliative care. This was a national project. And it was such a gift for me to be invited on this. I was one of six writers across different professions. And we were given different sections of this manual to write about and what this was, in palliative care, there's something called the National Consensus Project, which has developed these eight domains of care with subdomains in each area, but spirituality was one that at the time, they had not really fleshed out very well. So it was our test to begin doing this and then we There was a consensus conference where they invited another 50 people to look at the document we started with, and add in their own changes. So in the end, it became really a great, very, let's say, not great, but a great project to be a part of, and a very helpful piece of work. Then when I went to Loyola University, because while I was at Kansas, I was commuting from Chicago. So I went to Loyola University in Chicago, and yeah, strange life, you know, in some ways, and I was able to develop a course there on loss, grief and dying well, and the first time I ran it, it was like, just okay, I mean, it really wasn't super wonderful. But what I did, every time I ran the course, I got feedback on everything. And I changed the course according to the feedback. So over just a few years, it was really, it really met the needs of students. And I had, I was only allowed to take 27 students, but every term I could teach it, I had students emailing me that they had to get into my class. And it wasn't as much because of the class, but I think it had something to do with the way that I taught it. And also the fact that they knew that they had need, and I always wondered, you know, do people come into social work have these awful loss/grief experiences, because some of the ones that they talked about, in their reflection papers were just far beyond what you think most people would experience. But anyway, then I wasn't able to meet the needs. So they began running it four times a year with other people. So that was very good. Then, here at Brunel University, I began to offer death cafes, which are informal opportunities for people to come together and talk about just, you know, their philosophy of death. They're not meant to be therapy sessions, although some people do find them very therapeutic. And so that's my next article to write up. But that was a public engagement event. So we had people from the community as well as people from the university and, and it was really a good, I think, a good opportunity. So that's sort of my background in this area.

Kris Judd 12:14

Well, Holly, you've just explained why we invited you to come and share with us as, as a person who definitely understands the process of dying and how to be a support to people, as they are dying, and to their loved ones. And you've got, you've engaged in it, you know, obviously, intellectually, but also with very real practical experience. And you bring, you said, you've always been kind of comfortable with death, you know, more of an intuitive sense that it's that it's okay. And, and yet many of us find ourselves with the thought of being with people who are dying, really uncomfortable, not knowing what to do what to say, not wanting to make a mistake, you know, knowing what a significant event this is in the life of the person, spiritually, physically in all areas, as well as their loved ones. And so I'd ask you, or we would ask you, as we, regardless of what priesthood office we hold, right now, it's just as, as as

disciples as people who care about others, what would you offer to us as suggestions as how to best be, you know, maybe how to best overcome those fears, those natural hesitations, but just to be with the people who are dying and their loved ones?

Holly Nelson-Becker 13:43

Well, you really hit on something that I think is really key, and that's overcoming your fear and working through your fear. And I've seen that too. It really in lots of people that I come into contact with. And I think that is critical for these times that we're living in right now. So in speaking directly to each other to you, but also to the people that will listen, later to this. I just wanted to say this work begins with you, your gifts, your talents, and the level of curiosity you bring that allows you to move in wider orbits. It also has to do with your experiences, knowing your knapsack of privilege that we that many of us carry, also knowing your pain, your learning and your joy, that bring you to this moment of working in end-of-life care and I don't want to say really working but I mean being responding care. And Kris, as you said earlier, it is about being present as fully present as you can be, which means letting go of yourself defeating thoughts. And we all have these, you know, they're questions of self-doubt. I don't know enough, I'm not good enough. So and just allow yourself to be guided by the Spirit. Because in the moment, you are fully God's instrument, you are all that he or she has when you are in connection with another person. And this is not a burden. But this is a benefit. And I want you to think of it this way as benefit of having a line or a link to the Holy Spirit and to God. So I wanted to impress upon you that my feeling is it's such an honor to accompany someone as they are dying. And there are so many gifts in this experience that you will have, but often they're not the ones that you might expect. So allow yourself to be surprised and just see, you know, what comes up in the experience. Before you go to minister to someone, or meet with the person or the family, I want you to remember to take time for your spiritual practice. So it needn't be long. And sometimes, you know, if you've had a really busy day, it's only a moment that you have just take that moment, do this for yourself, as well as for the person with whom you meet. This could be prayer, this could be meditation, it could be something like the white light visualization, or anything else. And we're really fortunate to have the spiritual formation center and all of the work that they've done and in sharing ideas with us of spiritual practices. I also want people to remember or to think or to imagine, let's say that time is not fixed in end-of-life encounters. I suspect that time is an artifice that helps us live our life on this planet. But it may not be there in the same way for someone who is dying. The life death boundaries are malleable, and people may hear voices or see visions of deceased relatives or friends. So you don't need to worry about assessing the truth claim for this doesn't matter. Just be with them in their space where they are. If you are close to the family or even if you are not, one possibility is to expect chaos. Families are often in tension. Not everyone wants the same thing for their loved one. Yeah, there is estrangement, there is compassion, there is anger, sadness, sometimes relief. You are the one who can hold the space for that time you are there for the person dying and for other family who are present. What are you holding? You are holding the spiritual space and as much as you can, the emotional space, as you alluded to Kris. Your preparation and presence, acknowledge the spiritual and help facilitate whatever spiritual encounter is needed. You are like a tuning fork that helps others keep or get to the tune, which is not necessarily your tune, but is their tune, so what you're doing is you're turning people back to themselves, to their core selves. You are like a mirror in which they don't see you, but they're seeing what is important for them to see. I also want you to know that whatever happens is out of your control. Beyond your control. You are an instrument of what is needed in their curriculum for their life. So I often

think of, as I've come to understand that in recent years, you know, we all have our own unique curriculum that is crafted by the Divine Power. Things don't always turn out as we hope or expect. Not always does everything come together well. Still. Still, you can guess or know that what unfolds is as it should be. We don't know the purposes of God who is so much greater than our small minds can comprehend. The master is available to all people and doesn't waste or reject anyone. He is ready to use all situations and doesn't throw away anything. This is called embodying the light. So that sounds like it might be biblical, right? Actually, that's chapter 27 of the Tao translated by Stephen Mitchell, which is my favorite translation, if people you know read more widely. I want to suggest that it's important for you to try to bring patience and stillness to the encounter. Try to reach out and sense what is most needed and be curious, be curious together with the family. And what that means is, is not thinking of yourself or worrying about how well you're doing or how poorly you're doing. But being there as much as you can for them. Allow any of your preconceived ideas about death to release, as you learn more, and grow in your own ability to face death with individuals and families. The knowledge we carry is usually provisional. And we keep it until we learn more. So this is sort of like waves moving outward, covering larger and larger ground or water or air, you know, when you throw a pebble in the water, the waves expand out. So that's kind of how our learning goes, when we're working in this area. And what you thought you knew, or what you thought you understood, well, it'll probably change. And you'll look back on this time a few years later, and think, Wow, that was my beginning. Or that was when I was early in my phase of working with this. There is tremendous opportunity for spiritual and emotional growth at life end. This time matters a lot. And we do the best we can with it while living in a society that remains largely uncomfortable about death, just what you had said Kris earlier. And we see this, particularly in this post pandemic time, when so many have lost loved ones, there's a lot of uncertainty and a lot of fear in different areas. However, one interesting thing that I've noticed recently, there seems to be a proliferation of, of literature or stories, novels, in first person accounts in the area of death and dying, loss and grief. And these are from hospice doctors, from nurses, from just everyday people that have had losses and deaths that have really touched them, and they have something to share about how they're healing from that experience. And it's all good. And it all helps. You don't need to be a person with a lot of knowledge or a lot of learning sometimes that can even get in the way, you just need to be you. Over time, any kind of exposure to death and grief, loss and dying can move us into a place where we give death it's due. And we tip our hats to it. And I think that's important. So Kris, if you phrase the question to me, you said evangelists are often called to this area by the person dying or their family members. And I want to suggest they're also called another way. They're called by God to the place of dying or death, the death of others before their own. And I know, you know, you didn't really I mean, you would agree to that. So it wasn't really different. It just that that wasn't exactly a part of the question. So Evangelists are called by God and men and also other ministers to speak in terms of or to, to accept invitations offered. So this is an area of invitation, where invitations are held out and we choose to accept or, or delay or do it later. For some people entering this space of dying will be very, very difficult. They may have had, you may have had prior difficult experiences with family deaths been witness to motor vehicle accidents, may have had your own huge fear that can be incapacitating around death. But I want to tell you, that's okay. And pushing a little bit into your fear is a good thing, though not be going beyond the edge of your fear if you're not ready. So so everyone has their own timing for these things. And it's important to honor that. I have a little story I could share or I could just go on. (Share your story, please.) Okay, so. So one of my students had in one of my loss and grief classes had a sibling who died in a motor vehicle accident. And she and her brother were really

suffering a great deal from the loss of their sibling and interest in I mean, I don't know if this really matters, but so her dad was Hispanic and her mom was like, blonde hair, white Caucasian, and the three children that were born to that same marriage. Two of them were more dark complected, more Hispanic looking and one of them was blond and blue eyed. So when they were out together, they never looked like siblings. Well, when the sibling died, who was blonde and blue eyed. It was a great loss to her and all three siblings were close. But all the attention went to her parents, they got very little of it. So one of her points to us as the class was that she was the siblings are forgotten grievers. And, you know, to think about everybody who's affected by a death. But the other piece of that story is that that you're on Christmas break, she went, drove home with her boyfriend. And they came upon a horrible accident, they were not far behind. So she was one of the first out of the car. And she found a young woman who had been thrown outside of that car and who was very badly hurt. She told the young woman that she would stay with her that and she said, You are not alone, I will be with you. And as she did that, she was aware that, that the woman was dying, and her Spirit did leave her body. So what happened in this experience, because her own sister had died of a motor vehicle accident, was she was able to heal some parts of herself that had been very fragmented. And when she saw me after Christmas break, she ran over to me, and she said, I have to tell you this story, Holly, and you know, not that my, my class did anything at all with that, but maybe sensitized her to be able to think she could be with this woman alongside the road, I don't know. But you know, this was one of the things in the great curriculum of life that you can plan that can be very healing for a person.

Kris Judd 26:38

Yes.

Holly Nelson-Becker 26:41

So, back to this idea of invitation. So the Buddhist sometimes suggest that we meditate on our own death to break through any residual fear. Or we can personify death in a meditation experience. And ask it, whatever questions we have just in an experimental way, and see what comes. We are all on different paths. We all have different propensities, different natures different experiences. So it's important to respect each other's paths as Evangelists will do. And not to think less of a fellow minister who was more shy about serving in this area of ministry, it's important for us to understand that being there fully for another, while very gratifying, is not easy work. And it's okay to be or think you are a beginner in this area, you don't need a lot of expertise, you don't need a lot of experience. Wherever you enter is completely fine. You will witness singular beauty, moments when people are together that are just beautiful moments. You will also hear their wisdom, you will also hear their pain and their suffering. And in the end, can you say it's all okay? Because it is all okay and trust God enough to know also that sometimes a life cannot be tied up very neatly like a bone in the end.

Jane Gardner 28:18

So Holly, I have a quick question for you about your idea of invitation. So one of the things that's happened within the order of evangelists with the introduction of doctrine, covenants, 165, five, which talks directly to the order of evangelists. One of the subtle things that occur in that particular document is the shift or the suggestion of the shift from sitting back and waiting to be asked, and instead offering. Which I find interesting and a bit of a challenge in the situation. And when do I offer my presence, my ministry? Not always waiting to be invited, but offering. So, it's been I mean, we're still struggling with

this. I don't at least I haven't got that figured out yet. And I doubt most of the people in the Order have, but there's a shift happening there.

Holly Nelson-Becker 29:25

Well, I think that's really good. And I especially like it because sometimes you only have people, you may only have people who are deeply embedded in our faith community that are willing to ask for that kind of help or feel like well, they have to know the ministers to ask, whereas if you offer it, you can offer it to people that are sort of hovering about the fringes, and that may not have the self-confidence, certainly at the end-of-lifetime when they're so stressed to be able to even think about how to ask and who to ask. So I think offering actually is the right way to go. Well, I don't want to talk about terms of rightness or wrongness, because it really isn't that. I don't want to frame it that way. But I think it is, let's just say it is one very good way to address these issues. So thank you for mentioning that

Jane Gardner 30:14

We're learning. We'll see.

Holly Nelson-Becker 30:17

And that's it. It's all a learning process. And, each of us no matter where we are, on this journey of working with people who are dying, it is a learning and we, we will always be learning more, you know, we can count on that. That is one of the certain things like that our prior understandings will fall to the ground, and we'll learn more.

Jane Gardner 30:38

Well, you know, in the denomination about the role of evangelist. Can you talk a little bit about how evangelists might be particularly suited for this kind of ministry? Or what you might counsel us in that regard?

Holly Nelson-Becker 30:57

Yes I think the role of the Evangelist is very helpful, because most Evangelists have had experiences in giving Patriarchal Blessings or Evangelist Blessings, I guess we say now. And that suggests that there is a closeness with the Spirit that will help them in these end-of-life encounters, when anything can come up, and often does come up. And, you know, sometimes it's a matter of seeing past people's initial rejection or initial protests into the deeper Spirit. And that scene, that kind of perception can really help bring families together, because families Twitter around often on the surface, and at the end-of-life, you know, there's so many emotions, and so many, you know, we see this in advanced care planning, where people have different ideas about, about decisions that should be made. But that really, in some ways, it's less meaningful than I mean, I think the Evangelist has the capacity as, as no one else probably can to bring it all to step back from this and ask the questions, because it's, it's more about asking rather than telling. And it's more about, as you said earlier, Jane, offering, rather than even receiving. So I think, for the evangelists, it's about learning to be curious with their intuition in high gear, with their spiritual sensitivity in high gear, to ask sometimes it's asking the right question, is everything. Asking the right question can pull a whole family together? Who was, you know, at odds with each other a moment before if they stop and seriously consider that question. So, and you will often not know that in advance, that is something that is just given to you in the context of the situation. And that's

where the skills of the Evangelist are critical. And I also think that the Evangelists probably have a teaching/mentoring role here, in working with other ministers who might accompany them if permission is given by the family or individual who might learn from them, this kind of openness, because there really is an openness in the spiritual life. It's a letting go of your own self, your own perceptions, to step out into that space of encounter with the Spirit. And that's, you know, that's hard. And I'm sure it's hard for Evangelists, to because it's different from a blessing, if which I know a few people do those in advance now. But it's, you know, just fully stepping into that space. Yeah,

Jane Gardner 33:51

Thank you. That's very helpful.

Kris Judd 33:54

So as I was listening, I love this, I love your phrase, the curriculum for life, for our life. And I know that when my father passed, which was within the last, what is this month, August, when my father passed, within me was this, and I was his caregiver, was this struggle because before he entered the dying process, my curriculum was to be his caregiver, and to make sure he was eating and resting and I was doing everything I could to further his life. And then when his dying process began, my curriculum changed. And it was about not fixing, not trying to extend but to let go, let go of my own agenda, my expectations, my, you know, my curricula and curriculum and to say this is his journey, and I need to respect that and honor that. And so, what I'm hearing you say, for all of us as ministers is this invitation to get ourselves out of the way, the best that we can. And part of that is by preparing ourselves through maybe experiencing a meditation where we imagine or envision what our own death we would like it to be to become comfortable with it to, to learn to respect it, to befriend it, if you will. So that so that when we enter in with someone else who is there it is, death is not the enemy. And that we can be as fully present as possible is that that's kind of what part of what I'm hearing you say.

Holly Nelson-Becker 35:40

Right, but there's one more thing I want to add to that piece where you talked about being open to your father's curriculum. It's not just his curriculum, it's your curriculum as well. We tend to do that we tend to edit ourselves out of these experiences. But the curriculum was also very much for you, and your learning and your future development and what you can offer in the future for service. But the way to that, the way to get there, is to let go of everything you thought you knew and to step back. And in fact, when you're in the midst of it, you probably can't see the learning. It's only later that you'll be able to acknowledge, you know, what happened to me, and how did I grow and change this experience, but the curriculum was not just for your dad, it was for you.

Kris Judd 36:29

And that is so true. And so that would be true for all of us as ministers is that we can expect to be changed by the process, and by what we are offering that it is for us, as well as it is to be companion to someone else.

Jane Gardner 36:44

We've also been focusing mostly for evangelists, but others on the idea of deep listening. So when you talk about Holly, of stepping outside yourself, or stepping back from your own curriculum, your own needs, and actually being present in a way, that is a holy listening experience, which doesn't have a dictated order, or outline, what what I've learned about holy listening has to do with opening myself wide open without, as you're describing Holly, just letting your self be open to any way that emerges in the experience, and listening to what comes about as a part of that. So it's the ministry of presence, but it's particularly that that feeling of being able to be a holy listener for the family, or for the person in this experience. And that's hard work, isn't it Jane? It's hard to get yourself out of the way as Kris said.

Holly Nelson-Becker 38:03

Yeah, that too is a practice that I want to submit to you for your thinking and pondering about it that too learning to be a wholly listener, as you were describing. You know, it takes some effort to get there. And effort in the sense of letting go should be easy should be simple, but in our society, we're often taught to acquire rather than to let go. So, it's kind of goes against the grain in a sense, if you will.

Jane Gardner 38:29

Thank you. Well, how are you let's, whatever else you wanted us to know. Let's kind of leave that wide open for you to share with us.

Holly Nelson-Becker 38:38

Well, I have a couple of things. One is self-care. And I'm sure you've talked about that a little bit as Evangelists. But just to say, if you feel you have witnessed too much suffering, or in are heading towards burnout, compassion fatigue, or secondary trauma, it's important to pay attention to that and to honor that, because this arises out of your carrying your empathy and out of your engagement with other people. So it's a paradox in that the compassion we share can at times lead us to have less of it. So we need what we might call emotional bravery to show up and be willing to be moved by the pain of others. So, so oddly, this can break our hearts, but can also heal them in the service that we give. And I just wanted to tell people that there is some writing on self-compassion by Kristin Neff and Chris Germer, that's very good, that when we are providing ministry to others, it's important to include ourselves, pray for others, but also include ourselves in that prayer. So I wanted to say listen and hear, stay awake, journal or review your gratitude at day's end. So we can't be grateful for everything, but we can be grateful in everything. You want to connect to whatever you feel your sole purpose is to honor your grief and you and just know you will be touched by those who are dying. Connect with other Evangelists, find support, and even have regular local support groups, if desired. Spend time in nature and let it heal you. Touch or talk to the trees and the wind. Then in closing, I just have a few other points. So one of my students call me the Death Discussion Ambassador. And I think this was only because I work, a lot of people move away from death. For some reason, it's kind of a magnet for me. People think that's weird, but I like to initiate conversations about that. And so what I teach now is for people to think about their arc, the arc of their life. We might call this conscious living and conscious dying, this is really about being awake. There are a lot of people that don't want to entertain the idea of their own death. So they're looking away from it, right. But I think that's not a very useful approach. Although it's understandable when people are young. And some people say when they have a terminal diagnosis, it can be a great blessing. I think part of that is because they have then have time to do the

things that they put off, sometimes they have that time. So I want us all to think about the fact that our time on this earth plane is limited. And when we think of our lives as an arc, it kind of makes the end a bit sweeter. Life is just this wonderful gift. It's this time that we have to learn and grow. And so that's why I think of it as a gift to us. We are here for our learning. And many people do find that in service. And I think it's just a bit sad to be dying, and decide that we didn't do some of the key things that we'd always wanted to do, or hoped we'd do. And sometimes, those key things we had wanted, were lost because we were pursuing fame or fortune, which then disappear like the dust at our death, right? So what won't disappear? Well, if the love and memories that we've created and shared with others that lives on. And we think about how this can make a difference for the next seven generations. Things can never stay the same, nor would we want them to. We are always learning and growing. And sometimes we backtrack, and that's okay too. That's fine, too. So I think it's also important to realize when we connect up with the Spirit, the less alone we feel. And that's important to do always. And also just to, one of the, one of the things that really I really appreciate is poetry. And so there's a lot to be gained, I think, from poets and I don't know how many of you know, Rabindranath Tagore, or you wouldn't know he's been dead since 1941. But anyway, he's written some beautiful poetry in one of his poems says that... he won the Nobel Prize, by the way for literature in 1913. He said, "I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted, and behold, service was joy."

Jane Gardner 43:41

Thank you, Holly.

Kris Judd 43:43

Yeah, it's beautiful.

Jane Gardner 43:44

I have this wonderful feeling that we've just experienced a holy conversation. We're very, very grateful for that. Holly, and I could list names of people that have served in the memory area. Those people who have made a difference in our lives. And I know very simply, our our little Oriole/Skylark group that Holly and I were members of. We had one of our leaders, whose name was Eleanor. And many, many years later, I just happened to open a newspaper in Iowa, and saw that in Lamoni, they were holding her memorial service. And I was well three or four hours away. And I said to my husband, I'm going, I'm going to be there. And when I showed up and as the service progressed, her family was a little bit puzzled about my presence there. And I remember saying to her son, you don't understand what an influence she was on our lives. What memories we carry of her in our lives, and what a blessing she has been to all of us that knew her. And so anyway, that's one of those holy moments. I know that names bring back memories Holly.

Holly Nelson-Becker 45:16

It does. And thank you for sharing that. Because when I was writing some of my thoughts down this morning, her name Eleanor Chandler and Elbert Chandler were two of the names that I wrote down and thinking of our joint experience together. And I think, you know, they were just such a terrific couple. And I'm, you know, one thing maybe just to share briefly, so when I was, you know, confirmed into the church, Elbert Chandler was the one who did my blessing. And I remember my dad for thinking because he was newer in the church, then that Elbert wasn't really a great speaker. And, you know, he

wished that someone else had been available. But Jane, you and the other people that were being confirmed that day, had had, you know, chosen the people that were like, really good speakers. But I've never forgotten one of the things Elbert told me, he said, You will be a teacher, and people will look up to you. And at the time, I was, I don't know if you know this about me, but I was so darn shy. I mean, I was completely the shy one, and could never imagine myself ... could never imagine myself getting up in front of a class and speaking. And I thought to myself, Oh, you know, this is really wrong. It turned out to be true.

Jane Gardner 46:27

Such a blessing and so many wonderful memories. As a side note, my father, married Holly and Alex.

Kris Judd 46:37

Wow, what wonderful connection.

Holly Nelson-Becker 46:40

Yeah, I don't know if you if you knew that. I remember that. But yeah, that's right. And he stayed in touch with us at our anniversary, many, many years.

Jane Gardner 46:48

He'll be thrilled to know that we spoke today, I will be sure and share that with him.

Holly Nelson-Becker 46:52

Yes. And give him my love.

Jane Gardner 46:55

And I will do that. We are very grateful, Holly for your time today. And I know that the order will be blessed as they think through what you've shared with us. So thank you so much! Thank you. It was my privilege.

Blake Smith 47:12

You've been listening to Project Zion Podcast. We hope you've enjoyed this interview with host Jane Gardner and Kris Judd, and special guest, Holly Nelson-Becker. Again, we give a special thanks to Jane and Kris and Holly and the Order of Evangelists for sharing this episode with us here at Project Zion. or more exciting episodes, find us at Project Zion podcast.org or on any of your favorite podcast platforms. Have a blessed day.