

Gravestone/tombstone Unveiling Service

Written and compiled by Ana Gobledale

Supplies and preparation

- Water in sealed container
- Enclosed candle (windproof) & matches
- Tealights for everyone to light (optional)
- Stone (ideally about the size of one's palm, or smaller)
- basket or bowl of small stones or pebbles, enough for everyone (optional)
- cloth cover for entire gravestone (if family wishes for it to remain covered until it is unveiled during the service). This is placed over the gravestone before any of the family arrive.

Gathering scripture sentences --*Revelation 21: selected verses.*

Jesus says: 'See, I am making all things new. These words are trustworthy and true. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of life-giving waters. To those who believe these things, I will be their God and they shall be my people.'

Welcome and purpose

Welcome family and friends of [name of deceased]. After this interval since her funeral/memorial service/burial, how nice to gather this morning. We are learning to live without [name of deceased] alive in our midst. Ours is the blessing of memory, through which [name of deceased] continues to be with us, for love is stronger than death. The bonds created by love are eternal.

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Pray with me.

Spirit of love, God of the living and of the dead, be present with us this afternoon, as we mark and remember the life of your child, [name of deceased]. Thank you for love that endures.

Renew our faith that death is not the end, but the beginning of something new. Hear us as we pray in one voice, the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, saying:

(An alternative inclusive language version of the Lord's Prayer may be used.)

Reading - Ecclesiastes 3 (selected verses)

(read by _____)

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; ...

a time to break down, and a time to build up; ...

a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together

Reflection -- Memory Stones, Living Stones

With a bit of mourning and a bit of dancing, today is the time to mark this place as [name of deceased]'s final resting place.

The use of gravestones or grave markers is an ancient custom. We remember when Jacob marks Rachel's place of burial, as it is described in Genesis:

Genesis 35.19-20 (Reader: _____)

So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), and Jacob set up a pillar at her grave. It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day.

And, as Christians, we focus on Jesus, the Living Stone, chosen and precious. As it is written in Peter's first letter:

1 Peter 2:4-6 (Reader: _____)

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: 'See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'

Today we come with our own stone – this grave marker, to mark the final resting place of the remains of one of our 'living stones', [optional phrases to include: a beloved pillar of the church, a faithful Christian], [name of deceased].

[If you are dedicating a metal plaque, say something like: 'This plaque is like Rachel's stones, a marker to help us remember.]

Remove the cover & read the inscription

Today we [consecrate/celebrate/bless/dedicate/or other word relevant to family] this monument, this pillar of memory, an expression of love and respect. Please reveal the gravestone.

Family members might like to do these two tasks.

_____: *remove the cover from the stone.*

_____: *read the inscription aloud.*

Song – Rock of Ages (verses 1&4)

optional: depending on feelings of family; another relevant and meaningful song might be chosen

Sharing:

You all come with memories of [name of deceased], and some of you perhaps have thoughts that you would like to share. Is there anyone who would like to say something now?

Allow ample time for people to share.

Scripture Reading: 23rd Psalm

(an alternative reading using inclusive language may be substituted. This is one time I usually use the traditional male-language version, as these words are often held deep within us, and we are both affirmed and connected by sharing them.)

All who would like to are welcome to join me reciting Psalm 23.

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

He leadeth me beside still waters. He restoreth my soul.

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I shall fear no evil. For thou art with me.

Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.

Thou anointest my head with oil. My cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. Amen.

Symbols

I have brought three symbols, representing [name of deceased]'s faith journey, and our own faith.

Water:

First, water to recall [name of deceased]' baptism, and a reminder of God's presence in her/his/their life and claim upon it. We thank God for the Living Water that unites us as family.

Sprinkle the stone/ marker with water.

Light:

Secondly, I've brought a candle, to remind us of the light of hope and truth that shines in our world. We thank God for those, like [name of deceased], who shine such light into our world.

Light candle. [Use a covered candle holder to prevent candle from being blown out by the wind.]

Tealights might be made available to everyone gathered for each person to light and place beside the headstone, depending on the amount of breeze. This can be offered as a time of memory and prayer.

The candles that we shall light are a sign of the divine light in our minds and in our hearts.

Pray with me: Eternal one, Light of the world, may these flames be a sign of your light shining into the darkness of our world. Amen.

Invite all present to light the candles and put them at the sides of the stone.

Stone:

I've also brought a stone to remind us of God, the firm rock upon which [name of deceased] stood, and upon which we stand, our foundation in both life and death.

Place stone on ground beside or on gravestone/marker.

Conclusion of Unveiling

We conclude this ceremony with a time-honored tradition. Often when we visit the cemetery, we leave a token of our presence, perhaps fresh flowers or a photo. Today we leave this gravestone, naming and claiming this final resting place for [name of deceased]. We leave a sprinkling of water—God's life-giving water; some candles -- God's light for the world.

Now I invite you also to leave a little stone, a third reminder of God. God is often referred to as tsur yis-ra-el, the Rock of Israel. As you place your stone upon the monument, remember God, the firm rock upon which we stand, our foundation in both life and death.

Hand out stones for all to place by the tombstone.

Prayer

Pray with me.

God of the waters that nourish us, God of the lights of the heaven above us, God of the stones that lie deep beneath our feet, thank you for life, for [name of deceased]'s life, and for being with us as we transition from earthly life to life beyond death. We stand here today in the hope that our Sister/Brother, [name of deceased], is united fully with your spirit of love and peace.

Blessing & Dismissal

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to gather stones together, a time for mourning and a time for dancing,

a time for coming together and a time for going home.

[If gathering for refreshments... And now it's time for a cup of tea!]

Go in peace.

Clean up

After people have departed, blow out candles and remove safely. Stones may be left.
Be sure to remove the cloth used to cover the gravestone.

Readings

Genesis 35:19-20

So Rachel died.
And she was buried on the way to Ephrath,
that is, Bethlehem.
And Jacob set up a pillar at her grave.
It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb,
which is there to this day.

1 Peter 2:4-6

Come to him, a living stone,
though rejected by mortals
yet chosen and precious in God's sight.
And like living stones,
let yourselves be built into a spiritual house,
to be a holy priesthood,
to offer spiritual sacrifices
acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
For it stands in scripture:
'See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious...'

Ecclesiastes 3 (selected verses)

For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; ...
a time to break down, and a time to build up; ...
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones,
and a time to gather stones together...

Romans 8:35,37-38 (an alternative reading)

What will separate us from the love of Christ?
Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine,
or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?
No, in all these things
we conquer overwhelmingly
through him who loved us.
For I am convinced that; neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities,
nor present things, nor future things,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor any other creature
will be able to separate us from the love of God.