

Audio Script #4

Diaries, Letters & Commonplace Books: Living Fully

Diaries, letters and commonplace books are containers for memoir. They contain short stories of lived experience, and offer a glimpse of the meaning of life in a moment for both the writer and the one who treasures the writing.

I want to tell you what Commonplace Books are. They were developed in England in the 1700's as a way of collecting quotes, passages, sayings of other people. I have a book that I received when I was a young minister. It was compiled by an elderly woman on my pastoral charge, Kathleen Cowling. My book says it is #122. She wrote at least 122 books! I treasure it because I admire the effort and the time it took to fill page after page of cursive writing with her choice of words she felt important for me to read. It's a book of her wisdom written in the words of others.

Do you write down wisdom sayings or quotes that speak to your life? Do you remember proverbs or sayings your mother or father used that come to your own tongue in certain circumstances? Is there a special reason poems or bible verses hold wisdom for you? Do you treasure letters that tell of someone's life story and that story holds wisdom or guidance for you?

Here is a poem I have in my collection.

If you want to identify me,
Ask me not where I live,
Or what I like to eat,
Or how I comb my hair.
But ask me what I am living for,
In detail,
And ask me what I think is keeping me
From living fully
For the thing I want to live for. - Thomas Merton

What are you living for? Our spiritual memoir is a collection of stories about what we are living for - and - when we are truthful, it is also the story of what is keeping us from living fully for the thing we want to live for.

I hope you brought a diary or family saying to share. Perhaps you brought a letter that fascinates or inspires you. Tell the story to your group, but then pause and take some time to reflect on why you brought it and what it says about what you are living for?