

A Psalm of Life

As an English major in college, one of my favorite figures in literature was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807 – 1882), an American poet and educator whose works include *Paul Revere's Ride*, *The Song of Hiawatha* and *Evangeline*.

Born in Portland, Maine, then part of Massachusetts, he studied at Bowdoin College, and later held successive professorships at Bowdoin and Harvard College. Longfellow became the most popular American poet of his day, and some claim that he is the most distinguished poet this country has produced.

One of his poems, which should prompt reflection for each of us about our time on earth, is entitled *A Psalm of Life*, with a subtitle *What the Heart of the Young Man Said to the Psalmist*. It's worth a few moments of your time today, and here it is:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest;
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each tomorrow
Finds us farther than today.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act, – act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

(more)

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

Perhaps, more than any other professionals, we who work in Life Care, Century Park and Life Care at Home, identify with the soul of the poet as we see – and experience – life's dramas played out before us, and determine to make each new day better than the one before.

– Beecher Hunter