

Wellspring: Poetry for the Journey

May 21, 2018

A weekly poetry resource

from St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia



Morning

Salt shining behind its glass cylinder.
Milk in a blue bowl. The yellow linoleum.
The cat stretching her black body from the pillow.
The way she makes her curvaceous response to the small, kind gesture.
Then laps the bowl clean.
Then wants to go out into the world
where she leaps lightly and for no apparent reason across the lawn,
then sits, perfectly still, in the grass.
I watch her a little while, thinking:
what more could I do with wild words?
I stand in the cold kitchen, bowing down to her.
I stand in the cold kitchen, everything wonderful around me.

Mary Oliver¹

Reflections

As *Wellspring* comes to a close for this program year and as I prepare for a slower-paced summer of reading and writing, I leave you with this beautiful meditation by Mary Oliver—an accessible and clear poem that I think of as starting in morning and ending in eternity, starting in the kitchen and ending in bliss.

I have had moments like the one this poem illustrates (though I fear I could not have written a poem about them)—moments of awe, of miracle, moments when everything did feel—even if but for a moment—wonder-filled, everything shaded with the tint of the divine, moments of ecstasy that could not be explained, nor recreated.

Pentecost, one of the three major feast days in the Christian church, was yesterday; it is the day we commemorate and celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus' disciples who are bewildered, amazed, astonished and wondering what it all means. I like this poem as a companion: there's nothing bewildering here, except for the moment itself. And the astonishment is not because of "divided tongues, as of fire" but instead the simple wonder of a cold kitchen in morning, the cat and her milk, the grass, the salt shining. What, indeed, does it all mean.

¹ "Morning" by Mary Oliver from *New and Selected Poems*, Beacon Press. Used by permission.

Perhaps one does eventually run out of “wild words” to describe the amazement of existence. Or perhaps one keeps working anyway, keeps looking for more, keeps watching and, having witnessed the now-awakened cat leaping “for no apparent reason across the lawn,” keeps wondering what more could one do, what else but this, what else.

I wish my readers a season of joy, poetry, rest, and wonder.

✧ About the Poet

Mary Oliver, winner of the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, is a best-selling poet and one of America’s most beloved writers. Though born in Ohio, she spent much of her life in New England and now lives in Florida. For more than 40 years, she lived with her partner, the photographer Molly Malone Cook, until Cook’s death in 2005. She visited St. Stephen’s in a rare public appearance in 2011.



Wellspring: Poetry for the Journey

by Allison Seay, Associate for Religion and the Arts,
St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church © 2018