



LESSONS IN LIVING

Insights from the Mystics

“Part 4: Be Still and Know”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
June 28, 2026

Scripture Reading: Psalm 46 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

God is our refuge and our strength, who from of old has helped us in our distress. Therefore we fear nothing—even if the earth should open up in front of us and mountains plunge into the depths of the sea, even if the earth's waters rage and foam and the mountains tumble with its heaving. There's a river whose streams gladden the city of God, the holy dwelling of the Most High. God is in its midst, it will never fall—God will help it at daybreak. Though nations are in turmoil and empires crumble, God's voice resounds, and it melts the earth. YHWH Sabaoth is with us—our stronghold is the God of Israel! Come, see what YHWH* has done—God makes the earth bounteous! God has put an end to war, from one end of the earth to the other, breaking bows, splintering spears, and setting chariots on fire. “Be still, and know that I am God! I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted upon the earth.” YHWH* Sabaoth is with us—our stronghold is the God of Israel!*

** YHWH represents the divine name found in the Hebrew text. It represents the Divine Mystery and, traditionally, is not pronounced. Instead, we say “God” or some other term of reverence.*

Sermon

Thank you for making time to be here today. I know summer gets hectic, so I appreciate y'all being here. Today we're ending, at least for now, the series on mystics. Next week is the Fourth of July weekend, so we'll look at what it means to be Christian in the America we find ourselves in. My hope in this series was to help people reconnect with the deeper parts of their own spirituality.

Typically, mysticism grows up, at least as best I can tell, in hard times. In seasons of oppression, people have to go deep. When you lose control over your fate, it becomes important to find something deeper than what's happening to you. I think that's the cradle out of which mysticism comes. The problem is that mystics can be too adaptive. They'll put up with the oppression of others and still remain at inner peace. That's not the mature spirituality we're aiming for.

It's also, I think, pivotally important, especially when we're not in control of our destiny, to have something in us that isn't at stake. Some part of us that stands outside of fate and whatever is happening to us. Unfortunately, our culture doesn't give us that sense. So when good things happen, we're happy. When bad things happen, we're sad. The mystics are saying, *please don't think that's who you are*. At the surface level, that's who you are, but you're much deeper and more profound than that.

Yesterday, some of us went down to Dilly to remind the people who are incarcerated that there are people who haven't forgotten them, people who still love and care for them. I took a picture of the Japanese survivors of internment camps. Some of them were children. They were born in these camps. The paper cranes you see in the lobby were made by survivors of Japanese internment camps to support Hilda, Ivan, and immigrants here in Texas.

I posted a picture on my Facebook page, and I had a tsunami of MAGA males, as you can imagine. There is an epidemic of men who are so fragile they cannot find the courage to love. They think their cruelty is courage. They do not have the courage for democracy. They do not have the courage for diversity. Their fragile egos are threatened and assaulted by some of the most marginalized people on the planet.

I left the comments so people can see what's at stake. I'm not the target. When people attack me, they're trying to get at somebody else. At a time when it looks like cruelty has won the game, it matters to remember that we're part of a longer story. All of this—what looks like invincible cruelty—will self-consume. This has happened throughout history.

A MAGA male does not have a friend in the world. They have a mutual hatred of *the other*. They do not really like each other; they just hate us more, and they think of that as friendship. The hope is that we can all come to ourselves, including MAGA males.

Meanwhile, if we are going to be good friends to those who are being persecuted, we have to find deeper resources so we do not fall into despair. That is where mysticism can come in. It can help us realize that we are expressions of whatever creative energy has brought the universe into being. In Western spirituality, that is usually *God*. If that works for you, great. If it doesn't, there are spiritualities that are natural and do not need the invisible beings.

We're going to look at one person who was an incredible influence on my life and probably still my favorite Western mystic, Meister Eckhart. We're also looking at a song.

A mighty fortress is our God.

Be still and know that I am God.

I first understood this psalm, if I do understand it, while reading the *Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, where he says that all of yoga, with its countless forms, has a single purpose: to calm the restlessness of the mind until we can experience who we truly are. Eckhart represents that type of spirituality that is not based on searching for something outside ourselves.

Calming the mind and stripping away everything that is not really us is sometimes called “the negative way.” The deep pulse within you, when you let it settle without fighting it, simply letting it rest like a jar of muddy water, gives you a sense of who you are in the universe. You realize that whether it is a god or the universe itself, you have to be the offspring of a creativity. It may be a person; it may not be. You may be a theist; you may be a non-theist. You are an expression of the creativity that has brought this universe into being, whatever that source is.

We are looking at “Be still, and know I’m God” as almost the Western translation of Patanjali’s settling of the mind and realizing who we are in the cosmos. The first thing I take from this passage, when it says, “A mighty fortress is our God,” is that it obviously does not mean God protects us the way a bodyguard would.

If God is a bodyguard, we need to reduce the pay scale [laughter]. There’s a lot of stuff getting through these days.

I believe they’re talking about something deeper and more profound: that if you are the offspring of this deep creativity, there is a part of you beyond fate, a part fate cannot touch, because you come from something deeper. Eckhart taught that the only way to know God is to go deep and to live there. We cannot live in peace if we live shallow lives, and that is a sad truth. We need to spend enough time to feel our roots and to live in those roots, to not lose them in the business of the day or as we read the newspaper, to have something that stands outside the game of winning and losing.

When Luther wrote a hymn on this psalm, he said, “A mighty fortress is our God,” giving you the sense of an invincible fort, and then he speaks of earthquakes and the foundations being shaken. It resolves with the line “Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill, God’s truth abides still,” though I think it is truer to say *God’s love* abides still.

We have a tendency to try to find safety in what is static, yet in an evolving universe that is not our home; our home is in the change. The song has a line that says, “There’s a river that runs through it,” and there was a movie about that. It had a Presbyterian in it, which is probably the last important thing that happened to a Presbyterian. Unless a certain Presbyterian I know wins an election coming up [laughter].

One of the greatest refrains through Scripture is “fear not,” “do not fear,” and I think the psalmist is saying that there is nothing we have to fear in all of life or in all of death. It seems completely counterintuitive, yet if you live in your own depths, it becomes self-evident: you come from a mystery you do not know, you live in the mystery you do not know, and you return to the mystery.

The mystery is deeper in you than your personality, your body, and your mind. You are the expression of something cosmic.

I remember hearing a weather report where the meteorologist described a coming hurricane and mentioned that the great beasts of the ocean were going deeper than the hurricane, and I thought, *that’s what the mystics are trying to teach us to do*. There is a part of you that is deeper than the

storms of your life. The hope is that you can spend enough time in that place that the storms will no longer capsize you.

Eckhart told people to cut off everything that is not you to find your balance and your bearing, and then you can take it all back. If you think superficial things are who you are, it takes nothing to upset you. If you think you are your reputation and not your character, it takes nothing.

We learned that when people were saying all sorts of horrible things about our library to try to get at our Presbyterian friend. We have the option of living in that depth, of being deeper than the storms that blow around us. The psalmist said, *a river runs through it*.

The idea of the *kindom* of God (usually translated as “kingdom of God,” though we call it the *kindom*) is helpful to understand as an adverb rather than a noun. When you’ve only been taught to think of the sacred in terms of nouns, you’re not going to see many sacred things. When you realize there is a river flowing through your life, guiding and teaching simply because you are part of the universe, you no longer carry that sense of being alone.

One of the things I learned from Eckhart is that it is possible to say God is a being, or that God is a symbol of the dynamics of being itself, and that is where Eckhart lived; for him, God was everywhere. He called it the breakthrough. When you are taught as a child that God is an imaginary Santa-Claus-like being, that is one level of depth. When you realize you live within that reality, it is like the fish looking for the ocean. If a fish is looking for the ocean, it will only be able to experience it in the adverbs...warmth, buoyancy, saltiness.

For Eckhart, the essential insight was that God is everywhere, not a capricious individual to be begged or feared, but the creative source that brings us into being. We do not need to search for the source of our existence because we are already expressions of it. We do not need to persuade that source to love us; whatever it is, it is already bringing us into being.

Instead of thinking of the kingdom as a place...a palace, a Disneyland in the sky (and if that works for you, that’s fine)...instead of thinking of it as power or ruling, think of it as something that holds you through it all. It holds you together. It ties you to other beings. It is like a cosmic hug. In the depths we can experience it and not lose it, and even in the turmoil and the lightning and the thunder we can remember a part of ourselves that is beyond risk. The last line says, “Be still and know that I am God.”

For Eckhart, religion was about awareness, not belief. Mystics make fun of orthodox religion and usually wind up getting killed for it, yet if the goal is love, belief alone is not going to take us there. Everyone has known someone who could recite the Apostles’ Creed and was as mean as a snake. Who hasn’t had that experience [laughter]? People who are aware and compassionate may not always feel love, but they radiate it.

I want to close with three quotes from Eckhardt.

Justice is one of the goals of a mystic. Eckhart said a person is only truly just if they perform good works *without a why*, meaning entirely without motive, expectation of reward, or fear of

punishment. If you do a good deed to get into heaven or to be praised, Eckhart considered you a mercenary rather than a just person. Who wouldn't want to go to heaven if it is castles and golden streets and all that imagery? Yet if it is about loving, would you still want to go there if you had to be like Jesus?

Eckhart said God wants nothing of you but the gift of a peaceful heart, watching over your heart and keeping it gentle; you do not have to control the storm, only keep your heart gentle.

One of my favorite things he taught is that we are all meant to be mothers of God, for God is always needing to be born. Instead of looking externally for good, truth, or justice, give them birth in your own situation and your own time, and realize that is worth the trip. Even if you win the struggle, you still die, and the universe still collapses and begins again, so how we live is the game, and that has to be enough to live without a why, without needing reward or punishment, letting love be the same thing as heaven.

As we look at the world we live in and the cruelty and ignorance that seem to have seized the day, can we go deeper and realize there is a fortress within us, not because it is impervious, but because it is too deep for the storm to touch?

Can we realize that God is not a human being we have to flatter or beg, but a gentle stream running through our whole lives, always there?

Can we stop chasing after the holiness out of which we are born, stop searching for the creativity that has given us life and being, and instead realize that is who we are, the offspring of that sacred something?

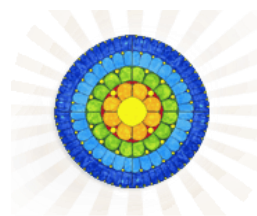
Can we be still and know we have nothing to fear in heaven or on earth or in hell, and can we realize that some creative force has brought us into being and holds us always?

Benediction

Rev. Erica Knisely

There is a river of life that runs through all of our lives. May you find the depth within you that is beyond chaos. May you drink from that living water and find peace. Beloved, be still and know that you are held. Know that you are loved. Go in peace. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.



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