

I want to start today's reflection with a poem by Mary Oliver. Mary Oliver was an American poet who won the Pulitzer prize in 1984. She found inspiration for her work in nature. Sadly she passed away in 2019. I'll ask Deb to read it now. Thanks Deb. The poem will make more sense as I carry on, I hope.

I know we all lead these crazy lives with this to do, that to do and this to stress about and that to stress about. But then, here comes Lent and it grasps us and invites us just to stop. Take a pause, take a breath, even if just for 40 days; look at our lives in the world through new lenses and accept the invitation to be changed or to be awakened spiritually.

Sometimes the word "repent" is used in regard to Lent. It does not mean fall on your knees and plead for forgiveness in that context. It means to turn around. It means to put on a new mind and turn around. It means to walk in a new direction. So Lent is not about feeling guilty. You know, don't be giving things up. That's pointless.

But rather, it's about opening our eyes to the sacred moments that are unfolding around us. If Jesus taught us anything, well this is it. Lent is about living as though we're coming up, you know, out of the water like He did long ago and feeling changed by the experience so much that our lives will take on a new path and a new direction. And I guess that's why we love this season, why we find such mystery in it, because through intentional experiences of waking up to the wonder of the world around us, through awe and reverence, well, then we truly wake up to this essence we call God in more and more powerful ways. We feel so intensely the presence of God in our own being, in our own breathing, in the beat of our hearts. And this allows us to see that same presence in everyone else and in the world around us. Lent is about that kind of awareness. It really is and my hope is that you can take some time to practice this kind of awareness to both reflect on times when you had the kind of experience that can only be defined as sacred or holy or indescribable, a thin time when you recognize that the God experience in some ways was absolutely a part of the very fabric of your being and to tune into new experiences that can only be described as breathtaking. I know you've had them. We all do.

We just need to cultivate a practice of waking up to them to recognize them as a calling to live into the world and its sacredness in deeper and deeper ways. When we can live intentionally like that, yeah, we will be changed. I guess that's why I love Mary Oliver and her poetry. I love The Summer Day. That poem is a timeless classic that asks something simple, but incredibly complex of us. First it calls us to look deeply into the world and not to dismiss.....don't even dismiss, the simple, apparently ordinary things, for laden in them is nothing short of something seemingly miraculous. For Oliver in that well known poem as Deb read it, it happened to be a grasshopper. There was an interview with her and she was talking about this poem and she was talking about how many people think she was using the grasshopper generally to make a bigger point. But she said" no, no, this was a real moment; this was a real grasshopper that flung itself onto her hand to join her in eating sugar from the cake she was enjoying. Her point, Mary Oliver's point was clear. Look deeply into the world, even the simple things, and you will bear witness to the continual divine unfolding of the ordinary, all inspiring moments in the world occurring around you all the time, especially these things that we just dismiss as ordinary.

Reminds me of Jesus imploring us, you know, not to miss the lilies of the field right? Or the birds up in the air or the joy of a wedding reception or the quiet and solitude of a mountain and maybe a garden, just to seek stillness in simple human moments loaded with sacredness.

But second, this poem asks us profound questions, like Lent. It reminds us of the fleeting nature of life. It is said " from stardust you came and to stardust you will return." It's a universal truth. Oliver says the same thing in different words, asking " Doesn't everything die at last and too soon? Doesn't everything die at last and too soon? And then having reminded us of the fleeting nature of life, she challenges us to live that fleeting life in the fullest sense, she says "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" Life is fleeting, you know. You will, I hate to break it to you, but you will pass away. So will I. We all will. All things do. So how are you going to live your life? That's the ultimate question of Lent And it's one that we should wrestle with into this season and beyond. Again, Lent is not about 40 days. It's about transformation for the rest of our lives as well.

And each year we are invited to participate in it yet again. Tell me what you plan to do with your one wild and precious life.

I know we've all had our spiritual moments in life. I also know, like Jesus did in his own time, more and more of those moments await us. Jesus didn't recognize the Kingdom of God, as he called it, only in that moment and moved on. No way. That was just the start. He later saw it in a woman at the well. Or he saw it unfold at dinner parties with all sorts of diverse people. He glimpsed it in intimate meals with friends. He felt it on the hillsides with hungry crowds or in a boat with frightened disciples. He saw it in the eyes of one who turned back to say thank you. He saw it again and again and again. And each time he was changed by it. That's how we are called to live. Woke to the sacred. It's okay to be woke. My hope for us all this Lent, we still have time. If you haven't started, now is your time; it's to live as though we were dripping with the waters of the Jordan as you arise to glimpse a new world like Jesus did long ago. My hope is that we can live with the same awe and reverence and honest recognition of the fleetness and preciousness of life as Mary Oliver calls us to. My hope is that we can let go and trust that we are living amidst a world just dripping in sacredness, even in the toughest, hardest times.

The gospel helps us:

Paul's image of the body teaches us that no one is optional in God's community. Every person, every identity, story and gift is needed for the body to flourish. PIE day reminds us to be public, intentional and explicit in saying what God has always said: you are needed, you are honoured, you belong.

Isaiah calls us repairers: people who mend what has been torn.

Crafting community means restoring justice, sharing generosity and building places of safety. For 2S and LGBTQIA+ people who have been pushed out or harmed in God's name, this work is urgent and holy. PIE day invites us to step into this identity as "repairers of the breach", making pathways where we can live, love and flourish.

As I was preparing for this reflection on this PIE day, two words came to mind: courage and love. And my superword given to me at a recent board meeting: clarity.

I'm pretty sure I'm clear on how I feel towards the gay community. It's two people loving each other right? Simple. Then we have the trans folks. A little tougher to wrap your head around but I'm starting to get it.

I have a nephew who is becoming my niece. John is becoming Liz. John is becoming Liz.

This guy is a prison guard. What kind of courage must HE have to change? To be who he really believes he was meant to be. But, it's happening. His co-workers at the prison support him and apparently so do many of the inmates he is caring for. That's love.

He is married with two children. What kind of courage does that take for his wife to support him? That courage comes from love. You love someone, you stand by them, you support them. It can't be easy, but God willing it will be a new beginning for all. As Paul said to the Colossians "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity". Liz's family are bound together, Liz's co-workers are bound together. Love and courage prevail.

So often trans, non-binary, queer, two spirit, lesbian, bisexual, gay, asexual, intersex people and many more are made invisible in worship. They become part of a generic welcome to everyone, or are cast as being welcome "regardless" or "despite" of diversity, not because of it. It shouldn't be this way.

You know Jesus lived some pretty tough times, right. This we know. But He never stopped seeing the realm of God unfolding around him right until the end of his own fleeting life and dare we say, beyond. So, be changed this Lenten season. Allow yourself to dwell in the mystery of the sacred and be confident that you are an intricate part of its unfolding evolution.

Finally, as we learned on Transfiguration Sunday a couple of weeks ago: Those three disciples' journey up and down the mountain caught my attention. Perhaps like the disciples hike, like your own physical or metaphysical hiking, my own metaphysical treks up mountains and down canyons have taught ME lessons about life and faith:

Whether its a hike up a mountain or the journey of life, take the right stuff—sturdy backpack, boots....or determined hope, deeply rooted in trust, courage (there's that word again) and a willingness to be led.

To have room for that “right stuff”, leave behind what's NOT needed: old doubts and fears.

As with Peter, James and John, it's good to walk with others. Sometimes we need their help with our loads. Sometimes they need us to shoulder theirs.

As those three disciples learned time and again, whether they were climbing up the rough side of a mountain or slogging through valleys of despair.....there was One who walked with them every step of the way. There is for us too.

God of the next step, thank you for giving us the strength and courage to take it. AMEN