

POETS

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Anyday always great poems

POEMS FOR PANDEMIC

Praise Song for the Pandemic

by Christine Valters Paintner via *The Work of the People*

blessing the boats,

by Lucille Clifton

may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that

Cicadas,

by “V” (formerly Eve Ensler)

Are we like the cicadas
Burrowed now under the earth,
Learning the language of falling
Deep in fecund soil
Covered with wet leaves, shame,
And the last traces of white snow?

Is this restless twitching, dreaming,
Grieving, remembering our homes,
Skin and earth --
Skin too?

It certainly feels like
We are very far under
Floating in our separate husks
Finally forced to learn to read the dark
In this radical underground
Where we suffocate and drown
Or our yearning compels us
To remake ourselves.

The cicadas cannot sting or bite.
Their only defense is to emerge
In the millions.

Leaving Early

(a poem in gratitude for health care workers)

By Leanne O'Sullivan

My Love,
tonight Fionnuala is your nurse.
You'll hear her voice sing-song around the ward
lifting a wing at the shore of your darkness.
I heard that, in another life, she too journeyed
through a storm, a kind of curse, with the ocean
rising darkly around her, fierce with cold,
and no resting place, only the frozen
rocks that tore her feet, the light on her shoulders.
And no cure there but to wait it out.
If, while I'm gone, your fever comes down —
if the small, salt-laden shapes of her song
appear to you as a first glimmer of earth-light,
follow the sweet, hopeful voice of that landing.
She will keep you safe beneath her wing.

Song of the Sea

by Rainer Maria Rilke

Timeless sea breezes,
sea-wind of the night:
you come for no one;
if someone should wake,
he must be prepared
how to survive you.

Timeless sea breezes,
that for aeons have
blown ancient rocks,
you are purest space
coming from afar...

Oh, how a fruit-bearing
fig tree feels your coming
high up in the moonlight.

Conspiracy of Goodness

Rev. Sue Phillips | March 2020

Holy One,
We are on our knees
In awe and supplication
For we have glimpsed the incomprehensible value
Of every human life.

We have seen the empty streets,
And the overflowing emergency rooms in makeshift hospitals.
We have heard the cries of children
Whose parents have died surrounded by strangers.
We have lamented the lack of sheltering care

in camps around the world.
We have glimpsed the fear that fuels selfishness.
We cannot un-see.

Help us, dear one.
Bathe our ears
Soothe our senses
Flush our eyes
Wrap your mother's arms around us,
For we need to be reminded of you,
to remember what is holy
and good.

We ask for the strength to remember that
Even within our isolation
We can be helpers.
We can be hope.

We are the face behind the protective gear
We are hands on feverish foreheads
We are neighbors singing on balconies
We are scientists searching for cures
We are dogs leaning against their frightened people
We are demands for detainees' release
We are hearts praying that relief comes first to those who need it most
We are the impulse to care for those who will die anyway.
We are the helpers, and the hope.
Inside our stricken hearts is all the evidence we need
That an unshakable conspiracy of goodness thrives amidst every ravaging threat.

Amen.

(Holds You)

By Padraig O Tuama on Instagram

If you can't sleep, get up.
Make tea.
Pray.
If you can't pray, pray anyway.
Light a candle.
Kneel.
Watch.
If you can't watch, watch anyway.
There are hares looking for food.
And there are sleeping robins beyond the dark window.
There are burrowing things burrowing.
There is this posture,
this story,
this practice that —
even if nothing else holds you —
holds you.

Breathe

By Over the Rhine

Go on and live your unexpected
life.

Inhale love. Exhale surrender.

Trust: all that's in between.

“Behold, all things are becoming new.”

Really?

There is fear,
there is shock,
there is separation and
there is sadness.

On earth, there always have been,
and always will be—unless, until
a man of sorrows
rides down the dawn on a white horse
with the jukebox turned way up
blasting an unexpected song,
hopefully Satchmo himself
in charge of
blowing the horn,
his cheeks bulging,
his eyes wide,
his lungs healthy.

But don't hold your breath.

Breathe.

Go on and live your unexpected
life.

Behold, we don't know what the future
holds.

We never did. We never will.

How much oxygen is there
in exhaled air?

All the best priests, pastors, rabbis,
and all the best friends
learn to leave elbow room for mystery.
Never trust anyone who is afraid of saying,
As far as I know.

Breathe.

Go on and live your unexpected
life.

Does your favorite coffee mug still feel good in
your hand? Did the tree swallows return
limpid in the air? They did here.

Are people you love still near?

Breathe deep into your lungs
while you still can. Even in the best of times
the expiration date remains
unknown.

Breathe.

Go on and live your unexpected
life.

Inhale love. Exhale surrender.
Trust: all that's in between.

When Death Comes

By Mary Oliver

like the hungry bear in autumn;
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse
to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;
when death comes
like the measles-pox
when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,
I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?
And therefore I look upon everything
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,
and I consider eternity as another possibility,
and I think of each life as a flower, as common
as a field daisy, and as singular,
and each name a comfortable music in the mouth,
tending, as all music does, toward silence,
and each body a lion of courage, and something
precious to the earth.
When it's over, I want to say all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.
When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,
or full of argument.
I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

God's Works

By Rev. Garnaas-Holmes

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned;

*he was born blind
so that God's works might be revealed in him."*
—John 9.3

Sooner or later someone is going to say
God sent the coronavirus to punish
somebody (gays, probably, or maybe old people).
Baloney.

God is not a guy who does things like that.
God is not a guy.
God is Love.
Love is not a guy who causes things to happen,
like giving you a disease or a mishap
or a lottery ticket or a recovery from illness
as a test, lesson, punishment or reward.
Love doesn't manipulate,
doesn't force you to experience something.
Love isn't in the past, settling accounts.
The pure, positive, life-giving energy of love is God.
Love doesn't play games.
It just blesses, nourishes, provides, connects, delights.
In our difficulties Love is with us, suffers with us,
gives us energy to prevail.
And sometimes that energy overflows in healing.
Love's works are revealed in blessing amid brokenness.

Ah! So Love will cure my troubles?
No. Love will love you though your troubles.
But what good is a god who can't fix things?
A god who suffers our suffering and doesn't stop it?
That is the question, and the answer, of the cross:
a God who will not stop crucifixions, but be crucified.
Such a suffering, forgiving, loving presence
is deeply healing, miraculously life-giving.
It puts us in touch with the very force of life
that causes us to live, to be healthy, to be whole.
And it opens our eyes to the work of Love.

We are experiencing the coronavirus
so that the work of love might be revealed.
If our eyes are open, we will reveal it.

The Hawk
by Franz Wright from *God's Silence*

Franz Wright, to his fellow monsters (us).

Maybe in a million years
a better form of human
being will come, happier
and more intelligent. A few already
have infiltrated this world and lived
to very much regret it,
I suppose.
Me,

I'd prefer to have come
in the form of that hawk, floating over
the mirroring fire
of Clearlake's
hill, my gold
skull filled with nothing
but God's will
the whole day through, instead
of these glinting voices incessantly
unerringly guiding me
to pursue
what makes me sick, and not to
what makes me glad. And yet
I am changing: this three-pound lump
of sentient meat electrified
by hope and terror has learned to hear
His silence like the sun,
and sought to change!
And friends
on earth at the same time
as me, listen: from the sound of those crickets
last night, Rene Char said
prenatal life
must have been sweet -
each voice perhaps also a star
in that night
from which
this time
we won't be
interrupted anymore - but
fellow monsters while we are still here, for one minute, think
about this: there is someone right now who is looking
to you, not Him, for whatever
love still exists.

Joy

By Malcolm Guite

How does she come, my joy, when she comes walking
Over the wasteland and the empty waves?
She comes unbidden between sleep and waking,
She comes like winter jasmine on cold graves,
She comes like some swift wind, she fills my sails,
And on we surge, cresting the wine-dark sea,
The fine prow lifting, as my vessel heels,
The tiller tugs and quivers, and I'm free
Of all the land's long cares. As that brisk breeze
Sings in the thrill and tremor of taut stays,
So my heart's rigging, tuned and taut as these,
Sings with the wind that freshens into praise.
For when Joy comes, however brief her stay,
She parts my lips, and I know how to pray.

Love (III)

BY GEORGE HERBERT

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back

Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

NO DISTANCE

By Rev. Garnaas-Holmes

In the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body
—1 Corinthians 12.13

Our social distancing is an illusion.
We are one. There is no distance. No gap.
Isolated in your apartment, you belong.

You breathe and it fills my lungs.
You weep and my heart is broken.
We are one body in many places.

In this time of separation we open our hearts,
we allow ourselves to flow out from our bodies
in Spirit to one another, to the strangers

who are part of us. Like the Italians
singing from their balconies with neighbors,
we are all notes of the same song.

Love flows where germs cannot. Meditate
on our amazing unity. Extend your spirit
to include all it includes: the whole world.

Breathe in this breath (so threatened!), a gift.
Breathe out this breath (so released!), a gift.
Let compassion for all beings flow with it,

in and out, refreshing your whole body,
the Body of Christ, the whole human family,
the whole Creation. Let love be our body.

Let your love take flesh. Make calls.
Write letters. And when you come back out

don't stop being one another's body. It's your life.

The Peace of Wild Things

By Wendell Berry

Listen

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Hosanna

By Rev. Garnaas-Holmes

Save us, we beseech you, O Love!
O Love, we beg of you, give us success!
—Psalm 118.25

This is our praise.
Hosanna does not mean Hooray!
It means Help!

We offer no flattering words,
but confess our dependence
and confidence in you, O God.

Our praise is our trust,
our turning to you: the One
who can save, none other, no less.

That we throw ourselves in your arms,
that we expect grace and mercy from you,
this is our praise.

From our sin and our sorrow,
from our greed and our graves,
rescue us, O Holy One.

Carrion Comfort

BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
Not untwist — slack they may be — these last strands of man
In me ór, most weary, cry *I can no more*. I can;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.
But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me? scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones? and fan,

O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid thee and flee?

Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear.
Nay in all that toil, that coil, since (seems) I kissed the rod,
Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would laugh, chéer.
Cheer whom though? the hero whose heaven-handling flung me, fóot tród
Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each one? That night, that year
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God.

Death, be not proud (Holy Sonnet 10)

By John Donne - 1571-1631

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou'art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy'or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

Unholy sonnets

by Mark Jarman

On the reversal of religion.

I.

Hands folded to construct a church and steeple,
A roof of knuckles, outer walls of skin,
The thumbs as doors, the fingers bent within
To be revealed, wriggling, as "all the people,"
All eight of them, enmeshed, caught by surprise,
Turned upward blushing in the sudden light,
The nails like welders' masks, the fit so tight
Among them you can hear their half-choked cries
To be released, to be pried from this mess
They're soldered into somehow—they don't know.
But stuck now they are willing to confess,
If that will ease your grip and let them go,
Confess the terror they cannot withstand
Is being locked inside another hand.

II.

After the praying, after the hymn-singing,
After the sermon's trenchant commentary
On the world's ills, which make ours secondary,
After communion, after the hand-wringing,
And after peace descends upon us, bringing
Our eyes up to regard the sanctuary
And how the light swords through it, and how, scary
In their sheer numbers, motes of dust ride, clinging—

There is, as doctors say about some pain,
Discomfort knowing that despite your prayers,
Your listening and rejoicing, your small part
In this communal stab at coming clean,
There is one stubborn remnant of your cares
Intact. There is still murder in your heart.

III.

Two forces rule the universe of breath
And one is gravity and one is light.
And does their jurisdiction include death?
Does nothingness exist in its own right?
It's hard to say, lying awake at night,
Full of an inner weight, a glaring dread,
And feeling that Simone Weil must be right.
Two forces rule the universe, she said,
And they are light and gravity. And dead,
She knows, as you and I do not, if death
Is also ruled or if it rules instead,
And if it matters, after your last breath.
But she said truth was on the side of death
And thought God's grace filled emptiness, like breath.

IV.

Time to admit my altar is a desk.
Time to confess the cross I bear a pen.
My soul, a little like a compact disc,
Slides into place, a laser plays upon
Its surface, and a sentimental mist,
Freaked with the colors of church window glass,
Rides down a shaft of light that smells of must
As music adds a layer of high gloss.
Time to say plainly when I am alone
And waiting for the coming of the ghost
Whose flame-tongue like a blow torch, sharp and lean,
Writes things that no one ever could have guessed,
I give in to my habit and my vice
And speak as soon as I can find a voice.

From a Window

BY CHRISTIAN WIMAN

Incurable and unbelieving
in any truth but the truth of grieving,

I saw a tree inside a tree
rise kaleidoscopically

as if the leaves had livelier ghosts.
I pressed my face as close

to the pane as I could get
to watch that fitful, fluent spirit

that seemed a single being undefined
or countless beings of one mind

haul its strange cohesion
beyond the limits of my vision

over the house heavenwards.
Of course I knew those leaves were birds.

Of course that old tree stood
exactly as it had and would

(but why should it seem fuller now?)
and though a man's mind might endow

even a tree with some excess
of life to which a man seems witness,

that life is not the life of men.
And that is where the joy came in.

Sweetness

BY STEPHEN DUNN

Just when it has seemed I couldn't bear
one more friend
waking with a tumor, one more maniac

with a perfect reason, often a sweetness
has come
and changed nothing in the world

except the way I stumbled through it,
for a while lost
in the ignorance of loving

someone or something, the world shrunk
to mouth-size,
hand-size, and never seeming small.

I acknowledge there is no sweetness
that doesn't leave a stain,
no sweetness that's ever sufficiently sweet

Tonight a friend called to say his lover
was killed in a car
he was driving. His voice was low

and guttural, he repeated what he needed
to repeat, and I repeated
the one or two words we have for such grief

until we were speaking only in tones.
Often a sweetness comes
as if on loan, stays just long enough

to make sense of what it means to be alive,
then returns to its dark
source. As for me, I don't care

where it's been, or what bitter road
it's traveled

to come so far, to taste so good.

The Pulley

BY GEORGE HERBERT

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
“Let us,” said he, “pour on him all we can.
Let the world’s riches, which dispersèd lie,
Contract into a span.”

So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

“For if I should,” said he,
“Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;
So both should losers be.

“Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness;
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.”

Blessing a home during a pandemic

(a blessing adapted from John O'Donohue's 'Blessing for a new home')

May this home be a shelter for you.
While you are bound here because of what is out there,
May all the weight of fear and panic
Fall from your shoulders.

May this home be a place of discovery
Where the possibilities that sleep
In the clay of your soul can emerge
To deepen and refine your vision
For all that is yet to come to birth.

May this be a house of courage,
Where healing and growth are loved,
Where dignity and forgiveness prevail;
A home where patience and spirit is prized,
And the sight of the destination is never lost
Though the journey be difficult and slow and lonely.

May there be great delight around this hearth.
May it be a house of welcome,
For all that is broken and diminished within you.
Because no one else is allowed to come knocking,
May you be hospitable to yourself.
May you have eyes to see that you too are a gift
And may you have enough generosity to bless yourself.

POEMS BY BIBLE STORY/CHARACTER

Zacchaeus

Eventual Saints

By Rev. Gaarnas-Holmes

He's short, and everybody ridicules him.
He's resentful and bitter. No sense of humor.
Give thanks for him.

He never gets along with others. Bad listener.
Hard to talk to. Always has his own agenda.
Bless him.

He's a loner, can't seem to relate to people.
Off by himself, in his own little world.
Honor him.

He's selfish, obsessed with his own wants,
clever at cheating others, without remorse.
Lift him in prayer.

He's no saint, nobody you'd set as an example.
Without morals. Surely without grace.
Revere him.

Then someone comes along and sees
who's inside him, hidden, waiting—and says,
Zacchaeus, I'm having lunch with you.

Maybe the sooner we shed our judgments
and see us all as equals on the journey
the sooner we all become the saints we are.

Pontius Pilate

Vessel

by Jared Carter

Alleged to be like one in which
———he washed his hands—
Electrum, touched with gold, and rich
———in figured bands
About the rim, where centaurs prance
———and woodland nymphs
Join ancient satyrs in the dance.
———But innocence
Is not responsibility
———cleansed by command;
And water, lifted, can but flee
———the trembling hand.

Rachel

Rachel

By Rev. Steve Gaarnas Holmes

Every year, politely aghast,
we push you aside, Rachel,
firmly usher you off stage
away from the baby
asleep in the manger,
no crying he makes,
so you don't wake him
with your wailing.
Again this year you aren't invited
to our pageant.

Let us come and kneel instead
at your cradle—empty—
your wanting lap,
and behold your devastation:
at the prison doors,
the border walls, the tent cities.
For once let's abandon our denial
that you are the reason he came,
not our comfort and joy,
that our violence is the manger
into which he empties himself,
your grief the abyss he willingly enters.
Your cry is his voice.
With you we shove him offstage,
and our complicity—
until we confess
we have ravaged the manger;
this is Good Friday,
and he does not bear his cross alone.

For you, Rachel,
and your children,
we still our confident carols,
hold silence,
and let your lamentation
be the song of our angels.

Jesus' Baptism

The baptism of our Lord

By Steve Gaarnas Holmes

Wade in.
Over your head.
“Go out into deeper waters.”
The river of the water of life flowing from the throne.
“Fill the jugs with water.”
The heavens torn open.
“The water I give you will become a spring in you gushing up with infinite life.”

Baptize me in this, Jesus.

“Lord, don’t you care that we’re about to drown?”

“Peace, be still.”

Then wash my hands and head, also.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Jesus wept.

A rickety little ark on a great, wide sea.

Baptize me in this, Jesus.

When all was dark and chaos, the Spirit brooded over the waters.

“She has bathed my feet with her tears.”

You who were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death.

“Pick me up and throw me into the sea, then the sea will quiet down for you.”

Deep calls to deep at the thunder of thy cataracts.

Baptize me in this, Jesus.

They went into the sea, the waters a wall for them on their right and on their left.

My beloved, in whom I am pleased.

I am poured out like water.

“Whoever gives a little one a cup of water...”

You must be born over and over from above.

Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

Baptize me in you, Jesus.

The Road to Emmaus

The Servant Girl at Emmaus (A Painting by Velazquez)

By Denise Levertov



She listens, listens, holding her breath.

Surely that voice

is his—the one

who had looked at her, once,

across the crowd, as no one ever had looked?

Had seen her?

Had spoken as if to her?

Surely those hands were his,

taking the platter of bread from hers just now?

Hands he’d laid on the dying and made them well?

Surely that face—?

The man they’d crucified for sedition and blasphemy.

The man whose body disappeared from its tomb.

The man it was rumored now some women had seen this morning,
alive?

Those who had brought this stranger home to their table

don’t recognize yet with whom they sit.

But she in the kitchen,
absently touching the wine jug she's to take in,
a young Black servant intently listening,
swings round and sees
the light around him
and is sure.

Cain & Abel

Cain's Wife

By David Kinloch

I was a tiller, a sower, a hoer, a sewer,
A siever a scyther, a shearer, a reaper,
A planter, a mower, a hereder, a milker,
A minder, a ploughed, a thresher, a gleaner;
With no time for a name of my own.

Then he killed Abel and I was
A drifter, a tramper, a marcher, a prowler,
A runner, a walker, a hiker, a rover,
A ranger, a jogger, a beggar, a hawker,
With no time for a name of my own.

There was a desert and vold,
Bush and veldt, steppe and silt,
Mould and dust. I was gravel.
I was pebble. I was flint. I was turf.
And I dreamed of a space

Crossed by voices that raised me,
By arms that held me,
And hands that offered me
To lips that kissed me
With no need for a name or a time.

Prodigal Son

The Prodigal's Mother Speaks to God

By Alison Funk

When he returned a second time
The straps of his sandals broken
His robe stained with wine,

It was not as easy to forgive.

By then his father
Was long gone himself,

Leaving me with my other son, the sullen one
Whose anger is the instrument he tunes
From good morning on.

I know.

There's no room for a man

In the womb.

But when i saw my youngest coming from far off
So small he seemed, a kid
Unsteady on its legs.

She-goat
What will you do? I thought,
Remembering when he learned to walk.

Shape shifter! It's like looking through water -
The heat bends, it blurs everything: brush precipice..

A shambles between us.

The Fall

(untitled)

By Leonard Cohen

In the eyes of men he falls, and in his own eyes too. He falls from his high place, he trips on his achievement. He falls to you, he falls to know you. It is sad, they say. See his disgrace, say the ones at his heel. But he falls radiantly toward the light to which he falls. They cannot see who lifts him as he falls, or how his falling changes, and he himself bewildered till his heart cries out to bless the one who holds him in his falling. And in his fall he hears his heart cry out, his heart explains why he is falling, why he had to fall, and he gives over to the fall. Blessed are you, clasp of the falling. He falls into the sky, he falls into the light, none can hurt him as he falls. Blessed are you, shield of the falling. Wrapped in his fall, concealed within his fall, he finds the place, he is gathered in. While his hair streams back and his clothes tear in the wind, he is held up, comforted, he enters into the place of his fall. Blessed are you, embrace of the falling, foundation of the light, master of the human accident.

The Lost Coin

Glinting in your soul

by Rev. Gaarnas-Holmes

The Divine One is searching for her silver coin
in you.

The sweep of your life is your search
for the Divine in yourself.

It is not outside or elsewhere
but in your house.

If you are still and look calmly you will see it
glinting in your soul.

Keep your eyes open until you find it. Then
“there is joy in the presence of the angels of God.”

The Fig Tree Parable

What the Fig Tree Said

by Denise Levertov

Literal minds! Embarrassed humans! His friends
were blurting for Him
in secret: wouldn't admit they were shocked.
They thought Him
petulant to curse me!—yet how could the Lord
be unfair?—so they looked away,
then and now.
But I, I knew that
helplessly barren though I was,
my day had come. I served
Christ the Poet,
who spoke in images: I was at hand,
a metaphor for their failure to bring forth
what is within them (as figs
were *not* within me). They who had walked
in His sunlight presence,
they could have ripened,
could have perceived His thirst and hunger,
His innocent appetite;
they could have offered
human fruits—compassion, comprehension—
without being asked,
without being told of need.
My absent fruit
stood for their barren hearts. He cursed
not me, not them, but
(ears that hear not, eyes that see not)
their dullness, that withholds
gifts *unimagined*.

The Lost Stuff Parables

Lost Blessing

By Jan Richardson

It doesn't always
mean to go astray.
But somehow
this blessing knew
it would find you here—
here in this place
where even you
don't know where
you are.
This blessing
regrets to say
it left its compass
at home.
It is without map,
chart, GPS.
It has hardly
any native sense
of direction.

This blessing
appears to be
nearly useless,
in fact.
But—
and I know
this might not be
encouraging—
it purely loves
getting lost.
This blessing
has learned to breathe
when it has left
every landmark behind,
when it has seen
its last signpost,
when dark has
begun to fall
while it is
still far from home.
This blessing
knows the prayers to say
when it has misplaced
its way,
the chants
that will help it
find the path
where it seems
no path could ever be.
This blessing
is good at finding
fellow travelers.
It loves the company
of the lost,
the wandering,
the confused,
the ones who have been
walking in circles
for days;
loves helping them
find water, shelter,
shade;
loves keeping vigil
so they can
safely rest.
The point of this blessing
is that it has
no real point.
It just wants you to know
you are not alone,
have never been,
will never be—
that it will go with you,
will wander with you
as long as you want,
as long as it takes,
gladly being lost with you

until your way
appears.

POEMS BY SEASON / HOLIDAY

Occupy our calendars

By Walter Brueggemann, June 1, 2000

Our times are in your hands:
But we count our times for us;
We count our days and fill them with us;
We count our weeks and fill them with our business;
We count our years and fill them with our fears.

And then caught up short with your claim,
Our times are in your hands!

Take our times, times of love and times of weariness,

Take them all, bless them and break them,
Give them to us again,
Slow-paced and eager,
Fixed in your readiness for neighbor.
Occupy our calendars,
Flood us with itsy-bitsy, daily kairoi,
In the name of your fleshed kairos.

Amen

For Advent

The Risk of Birth

By Madeleine L'Engle

This is no time for a child to be born,
With the earth betrayed by war & hate
And a comet slashing the sky to warn
That time runs out & the sun burns late.

That was no time for a child to be born,
In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;
Honor & truth were trampled to scorn—
Yet here did the Savior make His home.

When is the time for love to be born?
The inn is full on the planet earth,
And by a comet the sky is torn—
Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

Annunciation

By Marie Howe from *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time*, 2008.

Even if I don't see it again—nor ever feel it
I know it is—and that if once it hailed me
it ever does—
And so it is myself I want to turn in that direction
not as towards a place, but it was a tilting
within myself,
as one turns a mirror to flash the light to where
it isn't—I was blinded like that—and swam
in what shone at me
only able to endure it by being no one and so
specifically myself I thought I'd die
from being loved like that.

Annunciation

By Scott Cairns

Deep within the clay, and O my people
very deep within the wholly earthen
compound of our kind arrives of one clear,
star-illuminated evening a spark igniting
once again the tinder of our lately
banked noetic fire. She burns but she
is not consumed. The dew lights gently,
suffusing the pure fleece. The wall comes down.
And—*do you feel the pulse?*—we all become
the kindled kindred of a King whose birth
thereafter bears to all a bright nativity.

Theotokos

By Malcom Guite

You bore for me the One who came to bless
And bear for all and make the broken whole.
You heard His call and in your open 'yes'
You spoke aloud for every living soul.
Oh gracious Lady, child of your own child,
Whose mother-love still calls the child in me,
Call me again, for I am lost, and wild
Waves surround me now. On this dark sea
Shine as a star and call me to the shore.
Open the door that all my sins would close
And hold me in your garden. Let me share
The prayer that folds the petals of the Rose.
Enfold me too in Love's last mystery
And bring me to the One you bore for me.

For Christmas

For the Time Being

By WH Auden

Unto you a Child,
a Son is given.
Praising, proclaiming

The ingression of Love,
Earth's darkness invents
The blaze of Heaven,
And frigid silence
Meditates a song;
For great joy has filled
The narrow and the sad,
While the emphasis
Of the rough and big,
The abiding crag
And wandering wave,
Is on forgiveness:
Sing Glory to God
And good-will to men,
All, all, all of them.
Run to Bethlehem.

Christmas Blessing

By Rev. Garnaas-Holmes

May the coming of Christ
deepen your wonder
and widen your gratitude.

May the helpless child
bring forth your tenderness
and strengthen your love.

May the gentle mother
give you courage to embrace the holy
and find the divine in yourself.

May the child who shares our death
bring light into your darkness,
and hope to your weariness.

May the holy family in the stable
open your heart to the poor,
the homeless, the refugee.

May the child sought by soldiers
embolden you to cry out
and empower you to resist injustice.

May the angels who sing above you
awaken your heart
and surround you with beauty.

May the One Who Comes
remind you of your belovedness
and fill you with kindness and mercy,
and give you joy.

Now the Work of Christmas Begins

By Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

Rachel

By Rev. Steve Gaarnas Holmes

Every year, politely aghast,
we push you aside, Rachel,
firmly usher you off stage
away from the baby
asleep in the manger,
no crying he makes,
so you don't wake him
with your wailing.
Again this year you aren't invited
to our pageant.

Let us come and kneel instead
at your cradle—empty—
your wanting lap,
and behold your devastation:
at the prison doors,
the border walls, the tent cities.
For once let's abandon our denial
that you are the reason he came,
not our comfort and joy,
that our violence is the manger
into which he empties himself,
your grief the abyss he willingly enters.
Your cry is his voice.
With you we shove him offstage,
and our complicity—
until we confess
we have ravaged the manger;
this is Good Friday,
and he does not bear his cross alone.

For you, Rachel,
and your children,
we still our confident carols,
hold silence,
and let your lamentation
be the song of our angels.

For Winter / the New Year

New Year's Day

By Phil Zylla

A fresh blanket of snow
Lies before me;
A sojourn unexplored,
Hidden.

My soul is awake
To newness;
Alive to the promptings
Of life unlived.

Set out boldly.
Do not hesitate;
Gather yourself for the journey
Ahead.

Open-minded, willing,
Free.

Do not be afraid;
For I am with you.

Through the Coming Year

By Howard Thurman

Grant that I may pass through
the coming year with a faithful heart.
There will be much to test me and
make weak my strength before the year ends.
In my confusion I shall often say the word that is not true
and do the thing of which I am ashamed.
There will be errors in the mind
and great inaccuracies of judgment...
In seeking the light,
I shall again and again find myself
walking in the darkness.
I shall mistake my light for Your light
and I shall drink from the responsibility of the choice I make.
Nevertheless, grant that I may pass through
the coming year with a faithful heart.
May I never give the approval of my heart to error,
to falseness, to vanity, to sin.
Though my days be marked
with failures, stumblings, fallings,
let my spirit be free
so that You may take it
and redeem my moments
in all the ways my needs reveal.
Give me the quiet assurance
of Your Love and Presence.

Grant that I may pass through
the coming year with a faithful heart.

Letting Go

By Rev. Garnaas-Holmes

Before I step into the new year
I let go of the old one.
What I have done I have done.
What I have not done I have not done.
So be it. I release my regret.
I stand with myself.

For all the gifts I have received,
known and unknown, I am grateful.
However I have suffered I accept.
I learn what I can and move on.
Whatever others have done that hurt me,
I forgive. I learn and move on.
For however I have failed or fallen short,
I forgive myself. I learn and move on.

I release my fears.
I release my self-doubt, blame and self-silencing.
My hopes and dreams I place in God's hands,
trusting what is blessed will remain with me.

I am alive, and life is good.
I open myself to the future,
enfolded in this present.
Holy Mystery, I am yours.
I am here, now.

Like Snow

By Wendell Berry

Suppose we did our work
like the snow, quietly, quietly.
leaving nothing out.

A Winter Prayer

By Phil Zylla

try to relax
quell the simmering
anxiety.
put all your hopes
into
practice
love the world.
serve,
be free,
enjoy the bad weather.
you are free for
freedom's sake
live out –

a large destiny
no matter
what they say
try to relax,
quell the simmering
anxiety.

Prayer at Winter Solstice

By Dana Gioia

Blessed is the road that keeps us homeless.
Blessed is the mountain that blocks our way.
Blessed are hunger and thirst, loneliness and all forms of desire.
Blessed is the labor that exhausts us without end.
Blessed are the night and the darkness that blinds us.
Blessed is the cold that teaches us to feel.
Blessed are the cat, the child, the cricket, and the crow.
Blessed is the hawk devouring the hare.
Blessed are the saint and the sinner who redeem each other.
Blessed are the dead calm in their perfection.
Blessed is the pain that humbles us.
Blessed is the distance that bars our joy.
Blessed is this shortest day that makes us long for light.
Blessed is the love that in losing we discover.

Epiphany

Epiphany

BY JOANIE MACKOWSKI

A momentary rupture to the vision:
the wavering limbs of a birch fashion

the fluttering hem of the deity's garment,
the cooling cup of coffee the ocean the deity

waltzes across. This is enough—but sometimes
the deity's heady ta-da coaxes the cherries

in our mental slot machine to line up, and
our brains summon flickering silver like

salmon spawning a river; the jury decides
in our favor, and we're free to see, for now.

A flaw swells from the facets of a day, increasing
the day's value; a freakish postage stamp mails

our envelope outside time; hairy, claw-like
magnolia buds bloom from bare branches;

and the deity pops up again like a girl from
a giant cake. O deity: you transfixing transgressor,

translating back and forth on the border

without a passport. Fleeing revolutions
of same-old simultaneous boredom and
boredom, we hoard epiphanies under the bed,
stuff them in jars and bury them in the backyard;
we cram our closet with sunrise; prop up our feet
and drink gallons of wow!; we visit the doctor
because all this is raising the blood's levels of
c6h3(oh)2chohch2nhch3, the heart caught
in the deity's hem and haw, the *oh* unfurling
from our chest like a bee from our cup of coffee,
an autochthonous greeting: there. Who saw it?

Epiphany

By Walter Brueggemann

On Epiphany day,
we are still the people walking.
We are still people in the dark,
and the darkness looms large around us,
beset as we are by fear,
anxiety,
brutality,
violence,
loss —
a dozen alienations that we cannot manage.
We are — we could be — people of your light.
So we pray for the light of your glorious presence
as we wait for your appearing;
we pray for the light of your wondrous grace
as we exhaust our coping capacity;
we pray for your gift of newness that
will override our weariness;
we pray that we may see and know and hear and trust
in your good rule.
That we may have energy, courage, and freedom to enact
your rule through the demands of this day.
We submit our day to you and to your rule, with deep joy and high hope.

For Lent

(an excerpt from) **Fat Tuesday**
By Dante DiStefano

“... Out of exceeding gloom and out of God,
I break a prayer from a growl and sing
a hymn more ordinary than tap water.
I pray that I might be more than my skin,

this dance of atoms, this ritual of ash,
this tribe of twilight and rattled angels,
this pattern of epiphanies rejected.
I know all prayer is merely the patter
of little feet coming down the stairwell
in a daydream of a future household. . . .”

Prepping for Ash Wednesday: A prayer

By Ken Sehested, borrowing from St. Augustine and Isaiah 55:12

Return to your heart, O you transgressors,
and hold fast to the One who made you.
Stand with the Beloved and your footing
shall be firm. Rest in the Merciful One
and you shalt be buoyed.

Where do you go along these rugged
paths, pilgrim, so far from home yet so
winsomely loved? Be clear about what
you seek, and where you seek, for the
beatific life cannot be found in the land
of illusion. But do not despair, for life
is stirring in cracks and clefts and
barren terrain. Train your eyes to see
through the tangle of disordered desire.

Resist, even to death, that which bedevils
the common good. Welcome and foster
all that shields the battered, that restores
harrowed fields and forests, that reclaims
despoiled waters and all creatures great
and small.

In these lie your spiritual duty: the
performance of your praise and the
practice of your baptismal vows. By
such does your heart's delight align
with your hand's valor.

Thereby you shall you go out in peace
and be led back in joy, the hills bursting
in song, the trees in applause.

Ash Wednesday

By Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes

You are dust and breath,
matter and energy,
earth and Spirit.

Neither alone:
their need for each other,
their love of each other.

God is the love, the dance,
both wedded.

That's what makes us human.
Return to the bothness.

*God, to be true to our dust,
true to our breath,*

*your breath, your dust,
your bothness, your usness.*

*Give our love flesh,
our dust breath,
our death life.*

*Give our us you,
so we may give you
our us.*

Desert Prayer

By Jan Richardson, *In Wisdom's Path: Discovering the Sacred in Every Season*

I am not asking you
to take this wilderness from me,
to remove this place of starkness
where I come to know
the wildness within me,
where I learn to call the names
of the ravenous beasts
that pace inside me,
to finger the brambles
that snake through my veins,
to taste the thirst
that tugs at my tongue.
But send me
tough angels,
sweet wine,
strong bread:
just enough.

For Holy Week

Collects for the Stations of the Cross

By Padraig O Tuama

1- Jesus is condemned to death

God of the accused
and the accusing,
who made the mouth, the ear and
the heart of all in conflict.
May we turn ourselves towards that
which must be heard,
because there we will hear your voice.
Amen.

3 - Jesus falls for the first time

God of the ground,
whose body was - like ours - from dust,
and who fell - like we fall - to the ground.
May we find you on the ground
when we fall.
Oh, our falling fallen brother, may we find you, so that we may inhabit our bodyselves.
Amen.

4 - Jesus Meets his mother

Mary, Mother of Failure,
Where we do not understand
we can hope to know
that we are loved.
Pray for us to have the grace to know
our own stories of failure,
because much was kept from you,
but we know that you were loved.
Amen.

6 - Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Veronica,
your story is doubted
but valuable.
You did what you could
even though it was very little.
May we do the same
even when we doubt.
Amen.

10- Jesus is stripped

Jesus of the flesh,
Naked you came from the womb
and naked you were made for the cross.
May we always honour
the integrity of the body.
We ask this for no other reason
than our own dignity.
Amen.

13a - Jesus is placed in the arms of his mother

Jesus, our Lord of death,
You have gone where we
have not yet gone.
We honour your death with art.
May we also learn from our fear,
because fear
didn't save you from anything.

Amen.

13b - Jesus is placed in the arms of his mother

Mary, Mother of Death,

You held the corpse of your young son

- The worst of fears -

In your arms,

As he went where we have not yet gone.

We mark this

With silence and art.

May we also learn from fear,

Because fear

Won't save us from anything.

Amen.

14 - Jesus is placed in the tomb

Jesus of the unexpected,

for at least some of your life

this was not how you imagined its end.

Yet even at the end,

you kept steady in your conviction.

Jesus, keep us steady.

Jesus, keep us steady.

Because, Jesus, keep us steady.

Amen.

Heaven Tree

By Susan McCaslin, Carmanah Valley, Vancouver Island

Fungus climbs your steep side,

lilies cling to the hem of your skirt,

needles extend into the moist air.

Your bole is throne and seat

for many invisible parasites

All feed on you

but you never complain

of their dependency,

being drained, having to sustain

the whole thing in midair

Take, eat -

this is my body

green and brown and unbroken,

broken

for you

Blessing of Palms

By Jan Richardson

This blessing
can be heard coming
from a long way off.
This blessing
is making
its steady way
up the road
toward you.
This blessing
blooms in the throats
of women,
springs from the hearts
of men,
tumbles out of the mouths
of children.
This blessing
is stitched into
the seams
of the cloaks
that line the road,
etched into
the branches
that trace the path,
echoes in
the breathing
of the willing colt,
the click
of the donkey's hoof
against the stones.
Something is rising
beneath this blessing.
Something will try
to drown it out.
But this blessing
cannot be turned back,
cannot be made
to still its voice,
cannot cease
to sing its praise
of the One who comes
along the way
it makes.

Beloved, I give you myself
By Steve Garnaas-Holmes

Beloved, I give you myself,
ripe and unripe, dappled and incomplete,
dead and raised.

I wave my palms,
and yet I mean you harm.
I receive your body and blood in love,
and I collude in your suffering.
We spread our cloaks before you
all the way to the cross.

We cry for justice,
 feeding on the labor of the poor.
You are my highest treasure,
 which I will deny.
I will learn from you,
 then put you on trial,
 and not examine myself,
 and forget how you never judge me.
I promise my faithfulness,
 and I betray.

And yet by your grace I will come back.
Beloved, sift me, and redeem the wheat from the chaff.
Receive my broken, ill-fitting pieces,
bless them with your grace,
and mend me. Make me whole again.
Take my little faith with you to the cross;
in your dying let me die, and raise me new,
so that not with flawless piety
but with a widened heart, ripened by death,
I may strengthen my siblings.

Palm Sunday
by Malcome Guite

Now to the gate of my Jerusalem,
The seething holy city of my heart,
The saviour comes. But will I welcome him?
Oh crowds of easy feelings make a start;
They raise their hands, get caught up in the singing,
And think the battle won. Too soon they'll find
The challenge, the reversal he is bringing
Changes their tune. I know what lies behind
The surface flourish that so quickly fades;
Self-interest, and fearful guardedness,
The hardness of the heart, its barricades,
And at the core, the dreadful emptiness
Of a perverted temple. Jesus come
Break my resistance and make me your home.

For Easter

Easter
by Joyce Kilmer

The air is like a butterfly
 With frail blue wings.
The happy earth looks at the sky
 And sings.

Poem: "On Letting Easter In" by Macrina Wiederkehr, OSB

When dawn stands still with wonder

when birds jubilate in trees
when buds hurry into blossoms
and grass starts wearing green
I always know that Easter wants to come again.

But deeper yet and richer still
When Jesus, imprisoned in me,
asks me to roll away the stone
that locks him in
then Easter wants to come again.

So, let it come
It's one dawn past rising time
and Resurrection is the wildest news
that's ever touched
this crazy, mixed-up world.
It says, yes!
when everything else says, no!
It says, up!
when everything else says, down!
It says, live!
when everything else says, die!
Easter's standing at your door again,
so don't you see that the stone has got to go?
That stone of fear
of selfishness and pride
of greed and blindness
and all the other stones
we use to keep Jesus in the tomb.

So here's to rolling stones away
to give our Lord the chance He needs
to rise and touch
a troubled, lonely world.
Some call it Resurrection.
It's wild with wonder,
It's beautiful and real
Intent on throwing life around
it touches and it heals!

Yes, Easter, you can come
An angel of life I'll be.
I'll roll the stone away
and set you free.

Poem: "Consolation of Mary with Christ Arisen" by Rainer Maria Rilke

What they felt then: is it not
before all secrets sweet and yet still earthly:
as he, a little pale still from the grave,
relieved stepped up to her:
at every point arisen.
O to her first. How were they then
Inexpressibly being healed.
Yes, they were healing, that was it. They had no need
firmly to touch each other.
He laid for a second
scarcely his soon to be
eternal hand to her womanly shoulder.
And they began,
still as trees in Spring,
infinitely together,
this season of their ultimate communing.

On Generosity

By Walter Brueggemann

On our own, we conclude:
there is not enough to go around
we are going to run short
of money
of love
of grades
of publications
of sex
of beer
of members
of years
of life
we should seize the day
seize our goods
seize our neighbor's goods
because there is not enough to go around.

And in the midst of our perceived deficit:
You come
You come giving bread in the wilderness
You come giving children at the 11th hour
You come giving homes to exiles
You come giving futures to the shut-down
You come giving Easter joy to the dead

You come – fleshed in Jesus.

And we watch while
the blind receive their sight
the lame walk
the lepers are cleansed
the deaf hear
the dead are raised
the poor dance and sing.

We watch
and we take food we did not grow and
life we did not invent and
future that is gift and gift and gift and
families and neighbors who sustain us
when we did not deserve it.
It dawns on us – late rather than soon-
that “you give food in due season
you open your hand
and satisfy the desire of every living thing.”

By your giving, break our cycles of imagined scarcity
override our presumed deficits
quiet our anxieties of lack
transform our perceptual field to see
the abundance...
mercy upon mercy
blessing upon blessing.
Sink your generosity deep into our lives
that your muchness may expose our false lack
that endlessly receiving we may endlessly give,
so that the world may be made Easter new,
without greedy lack, but only wonder
without coercive need but only love
without destructive greed but only praise
without aggression and invasiveness....
all things Easter new....
all around us, toward us and by us
all things Easter new.
Finish your creation...
in wonder, love, and praise.
Amen.

On Belief in the Physical Resurrection of Jesus,
by Denise Levertov

It is for all
'literalists of the imagination,'
poets or not,

that miracle
is possible and essential.
Are some intricate minds
nourished on concept,
as epiphytes flourish
high in the canopy?
Can they
subsist on the light,
on the half
of metaphor that's not
grounded in dust, grit,
heavy
carnal clay?
Do signs contain and utter,
for them
all the reality
that they need? Resurrection, for them,
an internal power, but not
a matter of flesh?
For the others,
of whom I am one,
miracles (ultimate need, bread
of life,) are miracles just because
people so tuned
to the humdrum laws:
gravity, mortality-
can't open
to symbol's power
unless convinced of its ground,
its roots
in bone and blood.
We must feel
the pulse in the wound
to believe
that 'with God
all things
are possible,'
taste
bread at Emmaus
that warm hands
broke and blessed.

Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front
By Wendell Berry

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you

to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
Republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophesy such returns.
Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.

Listen to carrion – put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.

So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?

Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is highest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

For Earth Day

Earth Day

By Rev Garnaas-Holmes

God of Life,
this is the day you are creating;
we rejoice, and are glad in it.
We give thanks for all Creation,
which you are still creating:
for its beauty, its abundance of life,
for its unfolding wonder,
and for our blessed oneness.
Your sky is our lungs; your water our blood.
We confess our betrayal of our body,
imagining ourselves to be separate,
our selfish injury and abuse of the earth.
We repent, and seek to care for life
as attentively as you, for not one sparrow falls
outside your loving care.
May we regard the earth, our Mother,
our Womb, our Body,
with wonder, humility and gratitude,
and bear the fruit of love
so your creating beauty may unfold in us
as fully as in the wonders of nature.
Creating God, create us anew.
Amen.

For Ascension Day

A Sonnet for Ascension Day by Malcolm Guite

We saw his light break through the cloud of glory
Whilst we were rooted still in time and place
As earth became a part of Heaven's story
And heaven opened to his human face.
We saw him go and yet we were not parted
He took us with him to the heart of things
The heart that broke for all the broken-hearted
Is whole and Heaven-centred now, and sings,
Sings in the strength that rises out of weakness,
Sings through the clouds that veil him from our sight,
Whilst we ourselves become his clouds of witness
And sing the waning darkness into light,
His light in us, and ours in him concealed,
Which all creation waits to see revealed .

Stay: A Blessing for Ascension Day By Jan Richardson

I know how your mind
rushes ahead
trying to fathom
what could follow this.
What will you do,
where will you go,
how will you live?
You will want

to outrun the grief.
You will want
to keep turning toward
the horizon,
watching for what was lost
to come back,
to return to you
and never leave again.
For now
hear me when I say
all you need to do
is to still yourself
is to turn toward one another
is to stay.
Wait
and see what comes
to fill
the gaping hole
in your chest.
Wait with your hands open
to receive what could never come
except to what is empty
and hollow.
You cannot know it now,
cannot even imagine
what lies ahead,
but I tell you
the day is coming
when breath will
fill your lungs
as it never has before
and with your own ears
you will hear words
coming to you new
and startling.
You will dream dreams
and you will see the world
ablaze with blessing.
Wait for it.
Still yourself.
Stay.

For Pentecost

God's Grandeur

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Pentecost

By Malcolm Guite

Today we feel the wind beneath our wings
Today the hidden fountain flows and plays
Today the church draws breath at last and sings
As every flame becomes a Tongue of praise.
This is the feast of fire, air, and water
Poured out and breathed and kindled into earth.
The earth herself awakens to her maker
And is translated out of death to birth.
The right words come today in their right order
And every word spells freedom and release
Today the gospel crosses every border
All tongues are loosened by the Prince of Peace
Today the lost are found in His translation.
Whose mother-tongue is Love, in every nation.

For Mother's Day

An Invocation to God the Mother

By Susan McCaslin, *for Julian of Norwich*

Bless us
God the holocaust mother
God the harried housekeeping mother
God the multitasking mother
God the mother of anorexic girls
God the singed mother of furnaces
God the mother subsisting on beans
God the mother typing God knows what
God the poet mother
God the engineer mother
God the weeping mother
God the fatigued mother
God the wild and sequined mother
God the sweet mother napping
God the crosswise mother dancing
God the resurrected mother singing opera
God the born again mother in the stable of suburbia
God the Messiah mother
God the mother saying Kaddish for her mother
God the babbling, pellucid grandmother
God the foreshortened mother
God the motherless mother
God the untamed hyena mother
God the designing mother of looms and tapestries
God the intertidal mother with anemones and starfish in her hair
God the lioness mother in her pride

Bless us

Mother

By Rev. Garnaas-Holmes

"I am in the Mother and the Mother is in me."
—John 14.10

Womb of Love,
Mother of the universe,
you hold us within you,
contain us in your being,
nourish us with your self.

All living beings
are siblings in your love,
twins of your Spirit,
one in your flesh.

I belong to you,
grow in you,
flow with your love.

You who labor that we may live
and endure pain that we may be free,
may I be born again of you
by your mercy and delight.

We nurse at the breast of your love,
in the lap of your Creation,
your body given for us.
I open my soul to your grace.

May I always turn to you;
may I shine with resemblance
to my heavenly Mother.

For Ordinary Time

Prayer

By Marie Howe

Every day I want to speak with you.
And every day something more important
calls for my attention –
the drugstore, the beauty products, the luggage
I need to buy for the trip.
Even now I can hardly sit here
among the falling piles of paper and clothing,
the garbage trucks outside
already screeching and banging.
The mystics say you are as close as my own breath.

Why do I flee from you?
My days and nights pour through me like complaints
and become a story I forgot to tell.
Help me.
Even as I write these words I am planning
to rise from the chair as soon as I finish this sentence.

First

By Carrie Fountain

There is a holiness to exhaustion
is what I keep telling myself,
filling out the form so my TA gets paid
then making copies of it on the hot
and heaving machine, writing
Strong start! on a pretty bad poem.
And then the children: the baby's
mouth opening, going for the breast,
the girl's hair to wash tonight
and then comb so painstakingly
in the tub while conditioner drips
in slick globs onto her shoulders,
while her discipline chart flaps in the air
conditioner at school, taped
to a filing cabinet, longing for stickers.
My heart is so giant this evening,
like one of those moons so full
and beautiful and terrifying
if you see it when you're getting out
of the car you have to go inside the house
and make someone else come out
and see it for themselves. I want every-
thing, I admit. I want *yes of course*
and I want it all the time. I want
a clean heart. I want the children
to sleep and the drought
to end. I want the rain to come
down—*It's supposed to monsoon*
is what Naomi said, driving away
this morning, and she was right,
as usual. It's monsooning. Still,
I want more. Even as the streets
are washed clean and then begin
to flood. Even though the man
came again today to check the rat traps
and said he bet we'd catch the rat
within 24 hours. We still haven't caught
the rat, so I'm working at the table
with my legs folded up beneath me.
I want to know what is holy—
I do. But first I want the rat to die.
I am thirsty for that death
and will drink deeply of that victory,
the thwack of the trap's hard plastic jaw,
I will rush to see the evidence no matter
how gruesome, leaning my body over

the washing machine to see the thing
crushed there, much smaller
than I'd imagined it'd be,
the strawberry large in its mouth.

The Gate

By Marie Howe

I had no idea that the gate I would step through
to finally enter this world
would be the space my brother's body made. He was
a little taller than me: a young man
but grown, himself by then,
done at twenty-eight, having folded every sheet,
rinsed every glass he would ever rinse under the cold
and running water.
This is what you have been waiting for, he used to say to me.
And I'd say, What?
And he'd say, This—holding up my cheese and mustard sandwich.
And I'd say, What?
And he'd say, This, sort of looking around.

A Lay to the Relaxed

(if there be any such living)

By Susan McCaslin, Plot of Light

Pardon my quarrel with Tom Merton
The monk, contemplative, activist,
Or Bob Lax (lax and loose)
His best friend who ambled
Twenty-five years on Patmos
Writing minimalist poems

But let either of them trade their ascetic lives
For one whirlwind month of teaching, children
Lawn care, council proposals, editorial assistance,
Carpooling, proofs, meals, laundry, renovations
For their eremitic or coenobitic flow,
And just take a few notes.

Let them try to be artists, contemplatives,
Mothers, wife, colleagues, board members,
Friends, pet owners, tutors, grocery shoppers,
Home redecorators, guardians of teenaged chastity,
Referees of fights, peacemakers in the home,
Sexy consorts in bed, budget managers,
Nurses, and friends -
Then count the holy breaths.

Passing Ordinary Time

By [Enuma Okoro](#)

It is a hard art to learn,
catching quiet
by palms raised
cupped in
air shifting location

here and there like
trying to guess the pattern of falling leaves,
and hoping to feel
the soft descent of moments
when silence slips
This ordinary time is
gifted with days,
weeks of mundane grace
routinely following the liturgy
of hours anticipating creation
tuning its prayer and praise to the
rhythms of incarnate love.
I am used to the uproar,
the Holy drama,
the appetite's gnarled discord
of fasting and feasting on borrowed, time,
the knocking of angels,
the blubbing piety of waiting,
appointed seasons for guild and grief, tears of joy and disbelief,
the birth of miracles, the passion of virgins,
the mourning of a love so divine.
This ordinary time is
gifted in its quiet, marked passing
Christ slips about
calling and baptizing,
sending and affirming,
pour his Spirit like water
into broken cisterns,
sealing cracks and filtering our senses,
that we may savor the foolish
simplicity of his grace.

Autumn

AUTUMN

by Rainer Maria Rilke

The leaves are falling, falling as from far
Where distant with'ring gardens grace the skies,
They're falling with a gesture that denies.
And in the nights the heavy earth falls by
Into the loneliness, from a far star.
We all are falling. This hand falls, as it extends.
And take a look at others. It's in them all.
And yet there's One, holding this fall
With endless gentleness in both his hands.

For Veterans Day/Remembrance Day

Veterans Day

By Rev.Garnaas-Holmes

No parades today,
no patriotic tributes.

To honor those who have served,
care for the wounded,
the traumatized, the destitute.
Tend to the suicidal, the lonely, the tormented.

To honor those who serve,
clean up the hell we create for them.
Repent of your own violence of heart,
the warmongering of fear and competition
and demonizing strangers.
Resist urge to project our will across the world.
Be people of peace.

To honor those who serve,
tend to others, protect the weak,
sacrifice for the sake of the whole:
to honor those who serve,
serve.

For Thanksgiving

Come – Thanksgiving
By Belle Fox-Martin

Find your way
over the quiet earth,
under the charged skies.
Look across the emptied fields
and up at the geese
in their ordered disarray.
See the few apples
still holding to the stem.
Come to the table.
Find your way.
Don't deny hunger leaning
hard against your door.
Remember those things
easy to forget.
Uplift the lost
and blessings made manifest.
Find your way.
Come to the table.
Let thanks and giving
brush sweet against your cheek,
then watch the deer step
into the deeper wood;
as you raise your glass
and mouth prayers
into the chill.

Welcome Morning
By Anne Sexton

There is joy
in all:
in the hair I brush each morning,
in the Cannon towel, newly washed,
that I rub my body with each morning,
in the chapel of eggs I cook
each morning,
in the outcry from the kettle
that heats my coffee
each morning,
in the spoon and the chair
that cry "hello there, Anne,"
each morning,
in the godhead of the table
that I set my silver, plate, cup upon
each morning.
All this is God,
right here in my pea-green house
each morning
and I mean,
though often forget,
to give thanks,
to faint down by the kitchen table
in a prayer of rejoicing
as the holy birds at the kitchen window
peck into their marriage of seeds.
So while I think of it,
let me paint a thank-you on my palm
for this God, this laughter of the morning,
lest it go unspoken.
The joy that isn't shared, I've heard,
dies young.

Thanks

By W. S. MERWIN

Listen
with the night falling we are saying thank you
we are stopping on the bridges to bow from the railings
we are running out of the glass rooms
with our mouths full of food to look at the sky
and say thank you
we are standing by the water thanking it
standing by the windows looking out
in our directions

back from a series of hospitals back from a mugging
after funerals we are saying thank you
after the news of the dead
whether or not we knew them we are saying thank you

over telephones we are saying thank you
in doorways and in the backs of cars and in elevators
remembering wars and the police at the door

and the beatings on stairs we are saying thank you
in the banks we are saying thank you
in the faces of the officials and the rich
and of all who will never change
we go on saying thank you thank you

with the animals dying around us
taking our feelings we are saying thank you
with the forests falling faster than the minutes
of our lives we are saying thank you
with the words going out like cells of a brain
with the cities growing over us
we are saying thank you faster and faster
with nobody listening we are saying thank you
thank you we are saying and waving
dark though it is

For Halloween

God of the Living

A Blessing

By Jan Richardson

When the wall
between the worlds
is too firm,
too close.
When it seems
all solidity
and sharp edges.
When every morning
you wake as if
flattened against it,
its forbidding presence
fairly pressing the breath
from you
all over again.
Then may you be given
a glimpse
of how weak the wall
and how strong what stirs
on the other side,
breathing with you
and blessing you
still,
forever bound to you
but freeing you
into this living,
into this world
so much wider
than you ever knew.

All Hallow's Eve

By Rev Gaarnas-Holmes

The day we prepare to honor
the saints who have gone before,
first we get honest about the skeletons in our closet,
about how monstrous we can be
and what's spookiest about us
and what we most fear,
about our masks and false personas
and our secret aspirations,
about how we trick each other
and parade about stuffing ourselves with junk.
We get honest about it,
and also laugh about it.
We laugh at ourselves,
and also laugh at our evil.
Then, having lightened ourselves of the burden
of our righteousness,
tomorrow we can move on freely
without guilt or pretense
to be the saints we actually are.

Halloween

By Rev. Garnaas-Holmes

Monsters come knocking.
Open to them.

It's dark out there; they're
glad to step into the light.

Let them in. Feed them candy;
they'll unmask.

Once you compliment them,
their nearly convincing costumes,

learn their names, see their faces,
they're not as scary.

Besides, they live here.
They're your monsters.

Befriend your monsters.
They're all innocent children,

easily wounded,
looking for home.

All Saints

By Malcolm Guite

Though Satan breaks our dark glass into shards
Each shard still shines with Christ's reflected light,
It glances from the eyes, kindles the words
Of all his unknown saints. The dark is bright
With quiet lives and steady lights undimmed,
The witness of the ones we shunned and shamed.
Plain in our sight and far beyond our seeing

He weaves them with us in the web of being
They stand beside us even as we grieve,
The lone and left behind whom no one claimed,
Unnumbered multitudes, he lifts above
The shadow of the gibbet and the grave,
To triumph where all saints are known and named;
The gathered glories of His wounded love

For Silence & Prayer

How Good it is to Center Down

by Howard Thurman

How good it is to center down!

To sit quietly and see one's self pass by!

The streets of our minds seethe with endless traffic;

Our spirits resound with clashing, with noisy silences,

While something deep within hungers and thirsts for the still moment and the resting lull.

With full intensity we seek, ere thicket passes, a fresh sense of order in our living;

A direction, a strong sure purpose that will structure our confusion and bring meaning in our chaos.

We look at ourselves in this waiting moment—the kinds of people we are.

The questions persist: what are we doing with our lives?—what are the motives that order our days?

What is the end of our doings? Where are we trying to go? Where do we put the emphasis and where are our values focused? For what end do we make sacrifices?

Where is my treasure and what do I love most in life?

What do I hate most in life and to what am I true? Over and over the questions beat upon the waiting moment.

As we listen, floating up through all of the jangling echoes of our turbulence, there is a sound of another kind—

A deeper note which only the stillness of the heart makes clear.
It moves directly to the core of our being. Our questions are answered,

Our spirits refreshed, and we move back into the traffic of our daily round

With the peace of the Eternal in our step.

How good it is to center down!

Dark

By Nicola Slee, *Praying Like a Woman*

Malling Abbey Church

Here in the dark
do not speak.

Only
listen, hold your peace
and wait for the wordless gift:
the lifting of the lark's voice,
choice and sweet,
repeating its high note of love,
speaking your name,
calling you over and over
again.

Do not speak.
Let the visiting bird,
silence, do her work:
sift your heart,
heal what is broken,
sundered apart,
restore what is plundered,
repair the rift,
knit to one piece the unravelled mind,
scattered and split.

Wait for the gift,
the lifting of the warm,
beating wings,
the sudden shudder
under the brooding breast.
You must enter
here in the dark
where the heart sings.
Do not speak.

It is enough to listen to the silence

By Silvia Ostertag, *Living Silence: Tuning in and Practicing*

It is enough
to listen to the silence.
Silence comes o fetch us
where we have just been
with our thoughts and feelings.

It is enough
to listen to the silence.
Silence brings us
to where we are now,
right here,
into this room,
to this place,
this morning.

It is enough
to listen to the silence.
Silence embraces
what wants to become.
Whatever this day brings us,

is held,
and always has been,
in this silence
now.

It is enough
to listen to the silence.

(Untitled)

By R. S. Thomas

I think that maybe
I will be a little surer
of being a little nearer.
That's all. Eternity
is in the understanding
that that little is more than enough.

Prayer

By Christian Wiman

For all
the pain

passed down
the genes

or latent
in the very grain

of being;
for the lordless

mornings,
the smear

of spirit
words intuit

and inter;
for all

the nightfall
neverness

inking
into me

even now,
my prayer

is that a mind
blurred

by anxiety
or despair

might find
here

a trace
of peace.

Silence is Sufficient Grace

By Roxane Beth Johnson

Today I am going to try not knowing,
learn little and get nothing
out of it. Pliant and afloat
as a waterlily, I'll cradle my cup
of water and sip it like wine, knowing
good and well the taste of it is plain
as glass, as a sucked-clean dime.
I'll try not thinking
of God and wonder why he keeps me
in the dark though I beg and beg
for help, my prayers sharp
as skeins of red vinegar on my tongue.
Lord, the trees can let go
of every leaf when the air tells them: Now.
Tonight, I am going to water my ball of mud
and try not to touch and touch
the tender blades of grass shooting up
like the thorn, the thorn
in my side.

How to pray

By Nicola Slee

an empty room
asks to be sat in
for a long time
at different hours of the day and night
in many weathers
alone without words

perhaps hold an object in your hands
 a stone
 a cup
 a length of beads
for a long time

or place something well chosen
on the floor or a window ledge
where you will look at it
for a long time

a cup a vase a stone
a piece of wood

without asking or telling anything
imposing your own shape on the emptiness

as lightly as possible

leave and enter
many times
without disturbing its silences

gradually over many years
a room thus entered and departed
will teach you how to furnish and dispose of
the paraphernalia of a life

Let Your God Love You

By Edwina Gateley, *There Was No Path So I Trod One*

Be silent.
Be still.
Alone,
Empty
Before your God.
Say nothing.
Ask nothing.
Be silent.
Be still.
Let your God
Look upon you.
That is all.
God knows.
And understands.
God loves you with
An enormous love,
Wanting only to
Look upon you
With love

Quiet.
Still.
Be.

Let your God
Love you.

Prayer

By Mary Oliver, *Thirst*

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which

another voice may speak.

For Retreating

1.Surrender

By Susan McCaslin, *Plot of Light*

Entering this precinct under the icon of St. Anne,
An angel places a card in my hand containing the
Single word – surrender. I surrender to the hospitality
Of these nuns for five unstructured days. What must
Be surrendered? All the matrix of home chores and
Organization. I surrender barges of books. I surrender
Motherliness, laundry, dishes, homework en
Francais, wifely support. I lay down punctuality, lawn
Care, home economics, hearth-goddess, dog walking,
Emails, meetings of the Board, brainstorming.
Disarmed, someone with my name falls wondrously
Down into the dark, hyacinth-scented, loamy nest
Prepared for me in my Mother's house.

4. Migrating into God

By Susan McCaslin, *Plot of Light*

Time to lose the habitual motions –
From the flicking of the switch
To the thoughtless word.

Time to do a stint at release,
To unclasp clasping
As when peridot beads

Slide from the neck and white arms fall
From the prison of their hold.

Time to set the heart afloat
In the wide grey straight
With the wild island geese.

1.Rockies, Prairies, Tundra*

By Susan McCaslin

Soaring in the silver belly of a plane
Over BC's coastal mountains

Anxiety lifts, burdens of control
Momentarily laid down.

Leaving what you've made –
A prerequisite of birth.

Ground below, and up here
In the silence

These words:
You cannot fly outside the mercy.

*Poems written during a pilgrimage to Prades, France, the birthplace of religious writer, social activist, poet, artist, photographer, pioneer of east-west interfaith dialogue, Thomas Merton

FOR ANY TIME OF YEAR

God Speaks to Each of Us By Rainer Maria Rilke

God speaks to each of us as he makes us,
then walks with us silently out of the night.
These are the words we dimly hear:
You, sent out beyond your recall,
go to the limits of your longing.
Embody me.
Flare up like a flame
and make big shadows I can move in.
Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.
Just keep going. No feeling is final.
Don't let yourself lose me.
Nearby is the country they call life.
You will know it by its seriousness.
Give me your hand.

At Blackwater Pond By Mary Oliver

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars
of light,
are giving off the rich
fragrance of cinnamon
and fulfillment,
the long tapers
of cattails
are bursting and floating away over
the blue shoulders
of the ponds,
and every pond,
no matter what its
name is, is
nameless now.
Every year

everything
I have ever learned
in my lifetime
leads back to this: the fires
and the black river of loss
whose other side
is salvation,
whose meaning
none of us will ever know.
To live in this world
you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it
against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it go,
to let it go.

The Avowal

By Denise Levertov

As swimmers dare
to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air
and air sustains them,
so would I learn to attain
freefall, and float
into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns
that all-surrounding grace.

What to do with a compliment

By Paul Burgmayer

Let it melt away like a spring
snow white-splashed green,
wind-blown layers of warm and
cool.

Brush it off like sawdust clinging
to your shirt, taking time to
breathe in the wood's heart.

Let it burn like a candle, hot wax
weeping to your hands, clear light
to your eyes.

Taste it, savor it, like the last
Butterfinger from Halloween.

Or stand in it, palms up like a

summer shower falling hushed from
above.

Beloved Is Where We Begin

By Jan Richardson from *Circle of Grace*

If you would enter
into the wilderness,
do not begin
without a blessing.
Do not leave
without hearing
who you are:
Beloved,
named by the One
who has traveled this path
before you.
Do not go
without letting it echo
in your ears,
and if you find
it is hard
to let it into your heart,
do not despair.
That is what
this journey is for.
I cannot promise
this blessing will free you
from danger,
from fear,
from hunger
or thirst,
from the scorching
of sun
or the fall
of the night.
But I can tell you
that on this path
there will be help.
I can tell you
that on this way
there will be rest.
I can tell you
that you will know
the strange graces
that come to our aid
only on a road
such as this,
that fly to meet us
bearing comfort
and strength,
that come alongside us
for no other cause
than to lean themselves
toward our ear
and with their

curious insistence
whisper our name:
Beloved.
Beloved.
Beloved.

Patient Trust

By Teilhard de Chardin

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through
some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.
And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances
acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.
Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

THE ART OF BLESSING THE DAY

By Marge Piercy

This is the blessing for rain after drought:
Come down, wash the air so it shimmers,
a perfumed shawl of lavender chiffon.
Let the parched leaves suckle and swell.
Enter my skin, wash me for the little chrysalis
of sleep rocked in your plashing.
In the morning the world is peeled to shining.

This is the blessing for sun after long rain:
Now everything shakes itself free and rises.
The trees are bright as pushcart ices.
Every last lily opens its satin thighs.
The bees dance and roll in pollen
and the cardinal at the top of the pine
sings at full throttle, fountaining.

This is the blessing for a ripe peach:
This is luck made round.

Frost can nip the blossom, kill the bee.
It can drop, a hard green useless nut.
Brown fungus, the burrowing worm that coils
in rot can blemish it and wind crush it on the ground.
Yet this peach fills my mouth with juicy sun.

This is the blessing for the first garden tomato:
Those green boxes of tasteless acid the store sells in January,
those red things with the savor of wet chalk,
they mock your fragrant name.
How fat and sweet you are weighing down my palm,
warm as the flank of a cow in the sun.
You are the savor of summer in a thin red skin.

This is the blessing for a political victory:
Although I shall not forget that things work
in increments and epicycles and sometime
leaps that half the time fall back down,
let's not relinquish dancing while the music
fits into our hips and bounces our heels.
We must never forget, pleasure is real as pain.

The blessing for the return of a favorite cat,
the blessing for love returned, for friends' return,
for money received unexpected,
the blessing for the rising of the bread,
the sun, the oppressed.
I am not sentimental about old men mumbling the Hebrew
by rote with no more feeling than one says gesundheit.

But the discipline of blessings is to taste each moment,
the bitter, the sour, the sweet and the salty,
and be glad for what does not hurt.
The art is in compressing attention to each
little and big blossom of the tree of life,
to let the tongue sing each fruit, its savor,
its aroma and its use.

Attention is love, what we must give
children, mothers, fathers, pets, our friends,
the news, the woes of others.
What we want to change we curse and then pick up a tool.
Bless whatever you can with eyes and hands and tongue.
If you can't bless it, get ready to make it new.

Invitation

By Mary Oliver

Oh do you have time
to linger
for just a little while
out of your busy
and very important day
for the goldfinches
that have gathered
in a field of thistles

for a musical battle,
to see who can sing
the highest note,
or the lowest,
or the most expressive of mirth,
or the most tender?
Their strong, blunt beaks
drink the air
as they strive
melodiously
not for your sake
and not for mine
and not for the sake of winning
but for sheer delight and gratitude –
believe us, they say,
it is a serious thing
just to be alive
on this fresh morning
in the broken world.
I beg of you,
do not walk by
without pausing
to attend to this
rather ridiculous performance.
It could mean something.
It could mean everything.
It could be what Rilke meant, when he wrote:
You must change your life.

Black Rook in Rainy Weather

By Sylvia Plath

On the stiff twig up there
Hunches a wet black rook
Arranging and rearranging its feathers in the rain.
I do not expect a miracle
Or an accident

To set the sight on fire
In my eye, not seek
Any more in the desultory weather some design,
But let spotted leaves fall as they fall,
Without ceremony, or portent.

Although, I admit, I desire,
Occasionally, some backtalk
From the mute sky, I can't honestly complain:
A certain minor light may still
Leap incandescent

Out of the kitchen table or chair
As if a celestial burning took
Possession of the most obtuse objects now and then ---
Thus hallowing an interval
Otherwise inconsequent

By bestowing largesse, honor,
One might say love. At any rate, I now walk
Wary (for it could happen
Even in this dull, ruinous landscape); sceptical,
Yet politic; ignorant

Of whatever angel may choose to flare
Suddenly at my elbow. I only know that a rook
Ordering its black feathers can so shine
As to seize my senses, haul
My eyelids up, and grant

A brief respite from fear
Of total neutrality. With luck,
Trekking stubborn through this season
Of fatigue, I shall
Patch together a content

Of sorts. Miracles occur,
If you care to call those spasmodic
Tricks of radiance miracles. The wait's begun again,
The long wait for the angel.
For that rare, random descent.

The Garden

By Antonio Machado

The wind, one brilliant day, called
to my soul with an odor of jasmine.

'In return for the odor of my jasmine,
I'd like all the odor of your roses.'

'I have no roses; all the flowers
in my garden are dead.'

'Well then, I'll take the withered petals
and the yellow leaves and the waters of the fountain.'

the wind left. And I wept. And I said to myself:
'What have you done with the garden that was entrusted to you?'

This Mind of Dying

By Christian Wiman

God let me give you now this mind of dying

fevering me back

into consciousness of all I lack

and of that consciousness becoming proud:

There are keener griefs than God.
They come quietly, and in plain daylight,
leaving us with nothing, and the means to feel it.
My God my grief forgive my grief tamed in language
to a fear that I can bear.
Make of my anguish
more than I can make. Lord, hear my prayer.

Kindness

By Naomi Shihab Nye
Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

For One Who Is Exhausted, A Blessing

By John O'Donohue in *To Bless The Space Between Us*

When the rhythm of the heart becomes hectic,
Time takes on the strain until it breaks;
Then all the unattended stress falls in
On the mind like an endless, increasing weight.
The light in the mind becomes dim.
Things you could take in your stride before
Now become laborsome events of will.
Weariness invades your spirit.
Gravity begins falling inside you,
Dragging down every bone.
The tide you never valued has gone out.
And you are marooned on unsure ground.
Something within you has closed down;
And you cannot push yourself back to life.
You have been forced to enter empty time.
The desire that drove you has relinquished.
There is nothing else to do now but rest
And patiently learn to receive the self
You have forsaken in the race of days.
At first your thinking will darken
And sadness take over like listless weather.
The flow of unwept tears will frighten you.
You have traveled too fast over false ground;
Now your soul has come to take you back.
Take refuge in your senses, open up
To all the small miracles you rushed through.
Become inclined to watch the way of rain
When it falls slow and free.
Imitate the habit of twilight,
Taking time to open the well of color
That fostered the brightness of day.
Draw alongside the silence of stone
Until its calmness can claim you.
Be excessively gentle with yourself.
Stay clear of those vexed in spirit.
Learn to linger around someone of ease
Who feels they have all the time in the world.
Gradually, you will return to yourself,
Having learned a new respect for your heart
And the joy that dwells far within slow time.

[Traveler, your footprints]

By Antonio Machado

Traveler, your footprints
are the only road, nothing else.
Traveler, there is no road;
you make your own path as you walk.
As you walk, you make your own road,
and when you look back
you see the path
you will never travel again.
Traveler, there is no road;
only a ship's wake on the sea.

Love Sorrow

By Mary Oliver

Love sorrow. She is yours now, and you must
take care of what has been
given. Brush her hair, help her
into her little coat, hold her hand,
especially when crossing the street. For, think,
what if you should lose her? Then you would be
sorrow yourself; her drawn face, her sleeplessness
would be yours. Take care, touch
her forehead that she feel herself not so
utterly alone. And smile, that she does not
altogether forget the world before the lesson.
Have patience in abundance. And do not
ever lie or ever leave her even for a moment
by herself, which is to say, possibly, again,
abandoned. She is strange, mute, difficult,
sometimes unmanageable but, remember, she is a child.
And amazing things can happen. And you may see,
as the two of you go
walking together in the morning light, how
little by little she relaxes; she looks about her;
she begins to grow.

Overland to the Islands

By Denise Levertov

Let's go — much as that dog goes,
intently haphazard. The
Mexican light on a day that
“smells like autumn in Connecticut”
makes iris ripples on his
black gleaming fur — and that too
is as one would desire — a radiance
consorting with the dance.
Under his feet
rock and mud, his imagination, sniffing,
engaged in its perceptions — dancing
edgeways, there's nothing
the dog disdains on his way,
nevertheless he
keeps moving, changing
pace and approach but
not direction — “every step an arrival.”

LOVE

By George Herbert (1593-1632)

LOVE bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack'd anything.

'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy to be here:'
Love said, 'You shall be she.'
'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on Thee.'

Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them; let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.'

'And know you not,' says Love,
'who bore the blame?'

'My dear, then I will serve.'

'You must sit down,' says Love,
'and taste my meat.'

So I did sit and eat.

The Real Work

By Wendell Berry

It may be that when we no longer know what to do
we have come our real work,
and that when we no longer know which way to go
we have come to our real journey.

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.
The impeded stream is the one that sings.

Home,

By Warsan Shire (*British-Somali poet*)

no one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.
you only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well.
your neighbours running faster than you, the boy you went to school with who kissed you dizzy behind
the old tin factory is holding a gun bigger than his body, you only leave home when home won't let you
stay.

no one would leave home unless home chased you, fire under feet, hot blood in your belly.
it's not something you ever thought about doing, and so when you did – you carried the anthem under
your breath, waiting until the airport toilet to tear up the passport and swallow, each mouthful of paper
making it clear that you would not be going back.

you have to understand, no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.
who would choose to spend days and nights in the stomach of a truck unless the miles travelled meant
something more than journey.

no one would choose to crawl under fences, be beaten until your shadow leaves you, raped, then drowned,
forced to the bottom of the boat because you are darker, be sold, starved, shot at the border like a sick

animal, be pitied, lose your name, lose your family, make a refugee camp a home for a year or two or ten, stripped and searched, find prison everywhere and if you survive and you are greeted on the other side with go home blacks, refugees dirty immigrants, asylum seekers sucking our country dry of milk, dark, with their hands out smell strange, savage - look what they've done to their own countries, what will they do to ours?

the dirty looks in the street softer than a limb torn off, the indignity of everyday life more tender than fourteen men who look like your father, between your legs, insults easier to swallow than rubble, than your child's body in pieces - for now, forget about pride your survival is more important.

Small Kindnesses

By Danusha Laméris

I've been thinking about the way, when you walk
down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs
to let you by. Or how strangers still say "bless you"
when someone sneezes, a leftover
from the Bubonic plague. "Don't die," we are saying.
And sometimes, when you spill lemons
from your grocery bag, someone else will help you
pick them up. Mostly, we don't want to harm each other.
We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot,
and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile
at them and for them to smile back. For the waitress
to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam chowder,
and for the driver in the red pick-up truck to let us pass.
We have so little of each other, now. So far
from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange.
What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these
fleeting temples we make together when we say, "Here,
have my seat," "Go ahead—you first," "I like your hat."

The Journey

By Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice--
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,

and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do--
determined to save
the only life you could save.

Don't Hesitate

By Mary Oliver

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy,
don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty
of lives and whole towns destroyed or about
to be. We are not wise, and not very often
kind. And much can never be redeemed.
Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this
is its way of fighting back, that sometimes
something happens better than all the riches
or power in the world. It could be anything,
but very likely you notice it in the instant
when love begins. Anyway, that's often the
case. Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid
of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.

The Foolishness Of God

By Luci Shaw

1 Corinthians 1:20-25

Perform impossibilities
or perish. Thrust out now
the unseasonal ripe figs
among your leaves. Expect
the mountain to be moved.
Hate parents, friends, and all
materiality. Love every enemy.
Forgive more times than seventy-
seven. Camel-like, squeeze by
into the kingdom through
the needle's eye. All fear quell.
Hack off your hand, or else,
unbloodied, go to hell.

Thus the divine unreason.
Despairing now, you cry
with earthy logic—How?

And I, your God, reply:
Leap from your weedy shallows.
Dive into the moving water.
Eyeless, learn to see
truly. Find in my folly your
true sanity. Then Spirit-driven,
run on my narrow way, sure
as a child. Probe, hold
my unhealed hand, and
bloody, enter Heaven.

For Calling the Spirit Back from Wandering the Earth in Its Human Feet
By Joy Harjo

Put down that bag of potato chips, that white bread, that bottle of pop.
Turn off that cellphone, computer, and remote control.

Open the door, then close it behind you.

Take a breath offered by friendly winds. They travel the earth gathering essences of plants to clean.
Give it back with gratitude.

If you sing it will give your spirit lift to fly to the stars' ears and back.

Acknowledge this earth who has cared for you since you were a dream planting itself precisely within your
parents' desire.

Let your moccasin feet take you to the encampment of the guardians who have known you before time,
who will be there after time. They sit before the fire that has been there without time.

Let the earth stabilize your postcolonial insecure jitters.

Be respectful of the small insects, birds and animal people who accompany you.

Ask their forgiveness for the harm we humans have brought down upon them.

Don't worry.

The heart knows the way though there may be high-rises, interstates, checkpoints, armed soldiers,
massacres, wars, and those who will despise you because they despise themselves.

The journey might take you a few hours, a day, a year, a few years, a hundred, a thousand or even more.
Watch your mind. Without training it might run away and leave your heart for the immense human feast
set by the thieves of time.

Do not hold regrets.

When you find your way to the circle, to the fire kept burning by the keepers of your soul, you will be
welcomed.

You must clean yourself with cedar, sage, or other healing plant.

Cut the ties you have to failure and shame.

Let go the pain you are holding in your mind, your shoulders, your heart, all the way to your feet. Let go
the pain of your ancestors to make way for those who are heading in our direction.

Ask for forgiveness.

Call upon the help of those who love you. These helpers take many forms: animal, element, bird, angel, saint, stone, or ancestor.

Call your spirit back. It may be caught in corners and creases of shame, judgment, and human abuse. You must call in a way that your spirit will want to return.

Speak to it as you would to a beloved child.

Welcome your spirit back from its wandering. It may return in pieces, in tatters. Gather them together. They will be happy to be found after being lost for so long.

Your spirit will need to sleep awhile after it is bathed and given clean clothes.

Now you can have a party. Invite everyone you know who loves and supports you. Keep room for those who have no place else to go.

Make a giveaway, and remember, keep the speeches short.

Then, you must do this: help the next person find their way through the dark.

This Morning I Pray for My Enemies

By Joy Harjo - 1951-

And whom do I call my enemy?
An enemy must be worthy of engagement.
I turn in the direction of the sun and keep walking.
It's the heart that asks the question, not my furious mind.
The heart is the smaller cousin of the sun.
It sees and knows everything.
It hears the gnashing even as it hears the blessing.
The door to the mind should only open from the heart.
An enemy who gets in, risks the danger of becoming a friend.

God, help me discern

By Steve Gaarnas-Holmes

*Since you have been raised with Christ,
seek the things that are above, where Christ is,
seated at the right hand of God.
Set your minds at a higher level, on essential things,
not on meaningless details.*

—Colossians 3.1-2

God, help me discern what matters and what does not.
What helps me trust you and serve the world,
what helps me honor who you create me to be—
and what does not?
Help me let go of fears and desires and meaningless opinion,
judgments of the way things ought to be,
other people's ideas about me.
They don't matter. Let them go.

Set my mind on what is actually true and life-giving.
Help me be mindful of your grace at work always,
your constant presence, even in the awful times,
and the gift of being with you, even in the horrible times.
Fix my mind on your grace,
and give me faith to let go of everything else.
Nothing else will fit in this little lifeboat
but me and you, and your infinite grace.

Memories Crowd Upon Us

By Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart*

Many high hopes – many dreams unfulfilled;
Many blunders made and, in the sharpness of our anguish,
We could turn back the wheels of time and try again.

Many joys that were unanticipated;
Many little graces by which our faith in ourselves and in life
Is lifted up and strengthened –
Much for which we need to be forgiven;
Much we need to forgive.

All around us, our Father, there are reminders of Thy Presence in our midst:
Pangs of conscience,
A spontaneous impulse to do the kind and gracious thing,
The sensitiveness of another's needs,
The great burden of anguish which we feel as we look out upon the world.

Teach us, O living Spirit, the wisdom to lay ourselves
Bare to thy security – that we may reflect thy life
In the dark places of our minds, hearts, and desires;
That we may know thy courage – and the grounds of thy hope
For the children of men.

The Roof Nail

By Robert Bly

A hundred boats are still looking for the shore.
There is more in my hopes than I imagined.
The tiny roof nail lies on the ground, aching for the
roof.
Some little bone in our foot is longing for heaven.

Creed

By Meg Kearney

I believe the chicken before the egg
though I believe in the egg. I believe
eating is a form of touch carried
to the bitter end; I believe chocolate
is good for you; I believe I'm a lefty
in a right-handed world, which does not
make me gauche, or abnormal, or sinister.

I believe "normal" is just a cycle on
the washing machine; I believe the touch
of hands has the power to heal, though
nothing will ever fill this immeasurable
hole in the center of my chest. I believe
in kissing; I believe in mail; I believe
in salt over the shoulder, a watched
pot never boils, and if I sit by my
mailbox waiting for the letter I want
it will never arrive—not because of
superstition, but because that's not
how life works. I believe in work:
phone calls, typing, multiplying,
black coffee, write write write, dig
dig dig, sweep sweep. I believe in
a slow, tortuous sweep of tongue
down the lover's belly; I believe I've
been swept off my feet more than once
and it's a good idea not to name names.
Digging for names is part of my work,
but that's a different poem. I believe
there's a difference between men and
women and I thank God for it. I believe
in God, and if you hold the door
and carry my books, I'll be sure to ask
for your name. What is your name? Do
you believe in ghosts? I believe
the morning my father died I heard him
whistling "Danny Boy" in the bathroom,
and a week later saw him standing in
the living room with a suitcase in his
hand. We never got to say good-bye, he
said, and I said I don't believe in
good-byes. I believe that's why I have
this hole in my chest; sometimes it's
rabid; sometimes it's incoherent. I
believe I'll survive. I believe that
"early to bed and early to rise" is
a boring way to live. I believe good
poets borrow, great poets steal, and
if only we'd stop trying to be happy
we could have a pretty good time. I
believe time doesn't heal all wounds;
I believe in getting flowers for no
reason; I believe "Give a Hoot, Don't
Pollute," "Reading is Fundamental,"
Yankee Stadium belongs in the Bronx,
and the best bagels in New York are
boiled and baked on the corner of First
and 21st. I believe in Santa
Claus, Jimmy Stewart, ZuZu's petals,
Arbor Day, and that ugly baby I keep
dreaming about—she lives inside me
opening and closing her wide mouth.
I believe she will never taste her
mother's milk; she will never be
beautiful; she will always wonder what

it's like to be born; and if you hold
your hand right here—touch me right
here, as if this is all that matters,
this is all you ever wanted, I believe
something might move inside me,
and it would be more than I could stand.

The Sound of a Creature Not Stirring

By Janet and Julia Fletcher – a mother/daughter who made up and played
this game on nature walks (from *The Last Child in Nature*)

Sap rising
Snowflakes forming and falling
Sunrise
Moonrise
Dew on the grass
A seed germinating
An earthworm moving through the soil
Cactus baking in the sun
Mitosis
An apple ripening
Feathers
Wood petrifying
A tooth decaying
A spider weaving its web
A fly being caught in the web
A leaf changing colors
A salmon spawning

The Nameless Place

By Hal Green

I enter what enters me,
Reaching a place in me, yet not in me,
Releasing me to extend beyond
The sensed boundaries
Of my being alone in the world.
My breath taking in and yielding back
Your Breath, rarefying
My consciousness by
Your Spirit-oxygen.
The unspoken in me meets
Your silent Presence,
The one not confounding
But comforting the other;
Your vastness expands exponentially
The nameless expanse between us.
Nothing is lost but everything is gained.
I have no name for our unseen realm of meeting;
To attempt to circumscribe it with a name,
Could seem to reduce
You and me and us
To graspable conceptual constructs.
Naming inevitably births images,

And images risk possible idolatry:
Worshiping the image rather than what it depicts.
Images remain vulnerable to becoming surrogates
For true meeting and mutual abiding.
Naming God does not mean knowing God;
Naming our hidden place of meeting
Does not mean entering it.
When I do enter the nameless place,
My mouth will shut as my soul opens,
To receive and share directly
What cannot be put into words.
More than a mere space,
Which could be empty as well as filled
By quantities seeking named recognition,
What God opens between us Is never empty, nor nameable.

**This meditation builds on Meister Eckhart's comment that you can only experience God in God's own space. It also builds on my history of daily engaging in Centering Prayer.*

Small Kindnesses

By Danusha Laméris

I've been thinking about the way, when you walk
down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs
to let you by. Or how strangers still say "bless you"
when someone sneezes, a leftover
from the Bubonic plague. "Don't die," we are saying.
And sometimes, when you spill lemons
from your grocery bag, someone else will help you
pick them up. Mostly, we don't want to harm each other.
We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot,
and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile
at them and for them to smile back. For the waitress
to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam chowder,
and for the driver in the red pick-up truck to let us pass.
We have so little of each other, now. So far
from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange.
What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these
fleeting temples we make together when we say, "Here,
have my seat," "Go ahead—you first," "I like your hat."

The Wild Geese

By Wendell Berry

Horseback on Sunday morning,
harvest over, we taste persimmon
and wild grape, sharp sweet
of summer's end. In time's maze
over fall fields, we name names
that went west from here, names
that rest on graves. We open

a persimmon seed to find the tree
that stands in promise,
pale, in the seed's marrow.
Geese appear high over us,
pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,
as in love or sleep, holds
them to their way, clear,
in the ancient faith: what we need
is here. And we pray, not
for new earth or heaven, but to be
quiet in heart, and in eye
clear. What we need is here.

Wild Geese

By Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting --
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Yes! No!

By Mary Oliver

How necessary it is to have opinions! I think the spotted trout
lilies are satisfied, standing a few inches above the earth. I
think serenity is not something you just find in the world,
like a plum tree, holding up its white petals.

The violets, along the river, are opening their blue faces, like
small dark lanterns.

The green mosses, being so many, are as good as brawny.

How important it is to walk along, not in haste but slowly,
looking at everything and calling out

Yes! No! The

swan, for all his pomp, his robes of grass and petals, wants only to be allowed to live on the nameless pond. The catbrier is without fault. The water thrushes, down among the sloppy rocks, are going crazy with happiness. Imagination is better than a sharp instrument. To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work.

The Task

by *Denise Levertov*

As if God were an old man
always upstairs, sitting about
in sleeveless undershirt, asleep,
arms folded, stomach rumbling,
his breath from open mouth
strident, presaging death . . .

No, God's in the wilderness next door
— that huge tundra room, no walls and a sky roof —
busy at the loom. Among the berry bushes,
rain or shine, that loud clacking and whirring.
irregular but continuous;
God is absorbed in work, and hears
the spacious hum of bees, not the din,
and hears far-off
our screams. Perhaps
listens for prayers in that wild solitude.
And hurries on with the weaving:
till it's done, the great garment woven,
our voices, clear under the familiar
blocked-out clamor of the task,
can't stop their
terrible beseeching. God
imagines it sifting through, at last, to music
in the astounded quietness, the loom idle,
the weaver at rest.

Aphorisms for the Addicted

By Susan McCaslin

1

In the land of the lists
a far cry from holy Presence,
The jihad is for breath,
a spaciousness

2

Fighting to please customers:
not a good model for education.

3

Spending every moment figuring how to maintain balance,
one tumbles off the treadmill.

Happy fall.

4

Running as fast as you can to stay in the same place:
that Oxford don Lewis Carroll said it all.

5

Bring back the commas and the semicolons:
slow the pace of the sentence.

6

Pace of our lives:
unsustainable as our logging practices.

7

God never busts her butt;
yet everything gets done.

The Lost Words Blessing

By Spell Songs

Enter the wild with care, my love
And speak the things you see
Let new names take and root and thrive and grow
And even as you travel far from heather, crag and river
May you like the little fisher, set the stream alight with glitter
May you enter now as otter without falter into water
Look to the sky with care, my love
And speak the things you see
Let new names take and root and thrive and grow
And even as you journey on past dying stars exploding
Like the gilded one in flight, leave your little gifts of light
And in the dead of night my darling,
find the gleaming eye of starling
Like the little aviator, sing your heart to all dark matter
Walk through the world with care, my love
And sing the things you see
Let new names take and root and thrive and grow
And even as you stumble through machair sands eroding
Let the fern unfurl your grieving,
let the heron still your breathing
Let the selkie swim you deeper,
oh my little silver-seeker
Even as the hour grows bleaker,
be the singer and the speaker
And in city and in forest,
let the larks become your chorus
And when every hope is gone,
let the raven call you home...

Love

By Alex Dimitrov

I love you early in the morning and it's difficult to love you.
I love the January sky and knowing it will change although unlike us.
I love watching people read.
I love photo booths.
I love midnight.

I love letters and this is my letter.
To the world that never wrote to me.
I love snow and briefly.
I love the first minutes in a warm room after stepping out of the cold.
I love my twenties and want them back every day.
I love time.
Whatever it's here to do.
However it does it.
I love people.
I love people and my time away from them the most.
I love the part of my desk that's darkened by my elbows.
I love feeling nothing but relief during the chorus of a rock song.
I love space.
I love every planet.
I love the big unknowns but need to know who read my message, when they'll write or call, if they want the same things I do.
I love not loving Valentine's Day.
I love how February is the shortest month.
I love that Barack Obama was president.
I love the quick, charged time between two people smoking a cigarette outside a bar.
I love everyone on Friday night.
I love New York City.
I love New York City a lot.
I love that day in childhood when I thought I was someone else.
I love wondering how animals perceive our daily failures.
I love the lines in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof when Brick's father says, "Life is important. There's nothing else to hold onto."
I love Brick.
I love that we can fail at love and continue to live.
I love writing this and not knowing what I'll love next.
I love seeing a painting and being reminded I am alive.
I love Turner's paintings and the sublime.
I love the coming of spring even in the most withholding March.
I love skipping the usual "hey, how are you, good to see you" and getting straight to the center of pain. Or happiness.
I love opening a window in a room.
I love the feeling of possibility by the end of the first cup of coffee.
I love hearing anyone listen to Nina Simone.
I love Nina Simone.
I love how the past changes when there's more of it.
I love that people can choose their own families.
I love when no one knows where I am but feel terrified to be forgotten.
I love Saturdays.
I love that despite our mistakes this will end.
I love how people get on planes to New York and California.
I love the hour after rain and the beginning of the cruelest month.
I love imagining Weldon Kees on a secret island.
I love the beach on a cloudy day.
I love never being disappointed by chocolate.
I love that morning when I was twenty and had just met someone very important (though I didn't know it) and I walked down an almost empty State Street because it was still early and not at all late. And yes, I could change everything. I could find anyone. I was not sorry for who I was.
I love the impulse to change.
I love seeing what we do with what we can't change.
I love the moon's independent indifference.
I love walking the same streets as Warhol.
I love what losing something does but I don't love losing it.

I love kissing.
I love hailing a cab and going home alone.
I love being surprised by May although it happens every year.
I love closing down anything. A bar. A restaurant. That time between late night and dawn when one lamp goes on wherever you are and you know. You know what you know even if it's hard to know it.
I love being a poet.
I love all poets.
I love Jim Morrison.
I love Jim Morrison for saying, "I'd like to do a song or a piece of music that's just a pure expression of joy, like a celebration of existence, like the coming of spring or the sun rising, just pure unbounded joy. I don't think we've really done that yet."
I love everything I haven't done.
I love looking at someone without self-consciousness or panic.
I love the quiet of the trees in a new city.
I love how the sky is connected to a part of us that understands something big and knows nothing about it too.
I love the minutes before you're about to see someone you love.
I love any film that delays resolution.
I love being in a cemetery because judgment can't live there.
I love being on a highway in June or anytime at all.
I love magic.
I love the zodiac.
I love all my other lives.
I love that hour of the party when everyone's settled into their discomfort and someone tells you something really important. In passing. Because it's too painful any other way.
I love the last moments before sleep.
I love the promise of summer.
I love going to see theater and looking at ourselves.
I love glamour. Glamour! Which is not needed to live and shows people love life. What else is it there for?
I love red shoes.
I love black jeans.
I love the grotesque ways in which people eat ice cream. On sidewalks, alone, however they need it.
I love being in the middle of a novel.
I love how mostly everyone in Jane Austen is looking for love.
I love July and its slowness.
I love the idea of liberation and think about it all the time.
I love imagining a world without money.
I love imagining a life with enough money to write when I want.
I love standing in front of the ocean.
I love that sooner or later we forget even "the important things."
I love how people write in the sand, on buildings, on paper. Their own bodies sometimes.
I love silence.
I love owning a velvet cape and not knowing how to cook.
I love that instant when an arc of light passes through a room and I'm reminded that everything really is moving.
I love empathy. For strangers. For the people we've been who might always be strangers to us.
I love August and its sadness.
I love Sunday for that too.
I love jumping in a pool and how somewhere on the way up your body relaxes and accepts the shock of the water.
I love Paris for being Paris.
I love Godard's films.
I love wherever my friends are.
I love our Universe and how 95% of it is dark matter and energy. And the rest includes us.
I love the way anyplace looks from above. In a ferris wheel, in a hot air balloon.
I love bookstores and the autonomy when I'm in one.
I love the extra glass of wine we all know too well.

I love that despite my distrust in politics I am able to vote.
I love voting though I know art, not power, changes human character most.
I love protesting all wars no matter who's president.
I love what seems to me the discerning indifference of cats.
I love what might be the uncomplicated joy of dogs.
I love schools and teachers.
I love September and how we understand it as a way to begin.
I love knowledge. Even the fatal kind. Even the one without "use value."
I love getting dressed more than getting undressed.
I love mystery.
I love lighting candles.
I love religious spaces though I'm often lost there.
I love the sun for worshipping no one. And for showing up all the time.
I love the felt order after a morning of errands.
I love walking toward nowhere in particular and the short-lived chance of finding something new.
I love people who smile only when moved to.
I love that a day on Venus lasts longer than a year.
I love Whitman for writing, "the fever of doubtful news, the fitful events; / These come to me days and nights and go from me again, / But they are not the Me myself."
I love October when the veil between worlds is thinner.
I love how any moment I could forgive someone.
I love the wind and how we never see it.
I love the performed sincerity in pornography, and wonder if its embarrassing transparency is worth adopting in other parts of life.
I love how magnified emotions are at airports.
I love dreams. Conscious and unconscious. Lived and not yet.
I love anyone who risks their life for their ideal one.
I love Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera.
I love how people make art even in times of impossible pain. I love all animals.
I love that we continue to invent meaning.
I love the blue hours when Plath wrote Ariel.
I love that despite having one body there are many ways to live.
I love everyone looking for God.
I love everyone looking for a strong drink instead.
I love November because I was born there.
I love people who teach their children that most holidays are a product of capitalism and have little to do with love. Which would never celebrate massacre. Which would never care about money.
I love you if you've quit your job to be an artist.
I love you for reading this as opposed to anything else.
I love the nostalgia of the future.
I love that the tallest mountain in our solar system is on Mars.
I love dancing.
I love being in love with the wrong people.
I love that in the fall of 1922, Virginia Woolf wrote, "We have bitten off a large piece of life—but why not? Did I not make out a philosophy some time ago which comes to this—that one must always be on the move?"
I love how athletes believe in the body and know it will fail them.
I love dessert for breakfast.
I love all of the dead.
I love gardens.
I love holding my breath under water.
I love whoever it is untying our shoes.
I love that December is summer in Australia.
I love statues in a downpour.
I love how no matter where on the island, at any hour, there's at least one lit square at the top or bottom of a building in Manhattan.
I love diners.

I love that the stars can't be touched.

I love getting into a car and turning the keys. I love playing songs on repeat.

I love people who have quietly survived being misunderstood yet remain children. I love that Marilyn Monroe requested Judy Garland's "Over the Rainbow" to be played at her funeral. And her casket was lined in champagne satin. And Lee Strasberg ended the eulogy by saying, "I cannot say goodbye. Marilyn never liked goodbyes, but in the peculiar way she had of turning things around so that they faced reality, I will say au revoir."

I love the different ways we have of saying the same thing.

I love anyone who cannot say goodbye

Poem in Praise of Menstruation

By Lucille Clifton

if there is a river
more beautiful than this
bright as the blood
red edge of the moon if
there is a river
more faithful than this
returning each month
to the same delta if there
is a river
braver than this
coming and coming in a surge
of passion, of pain if there is
a river
more ancient than this
daughter of eve
mother of cain and of abel if there is in
the universe such a river if
there is some where water
more powerful than this wild
water
pray that it flows also
through animals
beautiful and faithful and ancient
and female and brave

[Joy is the Justice We Give Ourselves](#)

A Plea For Mercy

by [Anne Porter](#)

When I am brought before the Lord
What can I say to him

How plead for mercy?

I'll say I loved
My husband and the five
Children we had together
Though I was most unworthy

I'll say I loved
The summer mornings
I loved the way the sun comes up
And sets the dew on fire
I loved the way
The cobwebs shine
On the tall grass
When they are strung with dew

I'll say I loved
The way that little bird
The titmouse flies
I'll say I loved
Its lightness
Lilt
And beauty.

"A Plea For Mercy" by Anne Porter, from *Living Things Collected Poems*. © Zoland Books, 2006.
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Of Being

by **Denise Levertov**

Original Language English

I know this happiness
is provisional:

the looming presences --
great suffering, great fear --

withdraw only
into peripheral vision:

but ineluctable this shimmering
of wind in the blue leaves:

this flood of stillness
widening the lake of sky:

this need to dance,
this need to kneel:
 this mystery:

Excerpts from “Life Goes On”

by Howard Thurman

During these turbulent times
we must remind ourselves repeatedly that life goes on...
The wisdom of life transcends our wisdoms;
The purpose of life outlasts our purposes;
The process of life cushions our processes.
The mass attack of disillusion and despair,
distilled out of the collapse of hope,
has so invaded our thoughts
that what we know to be true and valid
seems unreal and ephemeral...
Let us not be deceived.
It is just as important as ever
to attend to the little graces
by which the dignity of our lives
is maintained and sustained.
Birds still sing;
the stars continue to cast their gentle gleam
over the desolation of the battlefields
and the heart is still inspired
by the kind word and the gracious deed...
To drink in the beauty that is within reach,
to clothe one's life with simple deeds of kindness,
to keep alive a sensitiveness
to the movement of the spirit of God
in the quietness of the human heart
and in the workings of the human mind—
this is as always the ultimate answer to the great deception.

~an excerpt from "Life Goes On" in Meditations of the Heart by Howard Thurman

it is not as simple
as
eat this not that eat that not this
take this not that take that not this
do this not that do that not this

you learn to listen
until you are the one writing the song
and the daily challenges
are the discordant notes
you must work into the score
making something more beautiful
than what there was before
not planned not wanted
but more powerful
because it is truth

but the music
will not come
if you are afraid
music like most things in life
enters in only one of two ways
el amor o el dolor
through love or through pain

Ire'ne Lara Silva (an excerpt from [blood.sugar.canto](#). read the whole thing!)

Idea

I will enjoy this life. I will open it
like a peach in season, suck the juice
from every finger, run my tongue over
my chin. I will not worry about clichés
or uninvited guests peering in my windows.
I will love and be loved. Save and be saved
a thousand times. I will let the want into
my body, bless the heat under my skin.
My life, I will not waste it. I will enjoy this life.