

Poetry Service
May 2, 2021
Rev. Dr. Judith Wright

The poet is the priest of the invisible. Wallace Stevens.

This morning's service is about the gift of poetry.
Our UUSL Poetry group has been meeting about twice a month,
since last May, coming together with great regularity,
including over the summer months, to share
poems that speak to us personally,
and that we wish to share with other group members.

I believe that our reading of poems with one another,
has helped each of us to find more meaning and purpose in our lives,
as well as help sustain us and enrich our lives during the pandemic.
This morning each member of our group will share
one or two poems that we especially like.
We will each read the poems we have chosen,
and speak briefly about what meaning the poems have for us.

As a beginning, let me just give a formal definition of what is poetry.
According to the dictionary, poetry is:

*A literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings
and ideas by the use of distinctive style and rhythm.*¹

That's a pretty basic definition.

Poets themselves provide us with some definitions of poetry that suggest,

¹ [what is poetry definition - Bing](#)

that poetry is an art, an art expressed through words.

Robert Frost said “a poem is an idea caught in the act of dawning.”

Samuel Coleridge defined a poem as “best words, best order.”

And Thomas Carlyle wrote that a poem is “a musical thought.”

Phoebe Hesketh tells us that “a poem is a painting.

A poem is a painting that is not seen. A painting is a poem that is not heard.”

We hope you find these poems as meaningful to you as they are to us.

Meditation *Our True Heritage* by Thich Nhat Hahn Read by Shela C

The cosmos is filled with precious gems.

I want to offer a handful of them to you.

Each moment you are alive is a gem,

Shining through and containing earth and sky,

water and clouds.

It needs you to breathe gently,

for the miracles to be displayed.

Suddenly you hear the birds singing,

the pines chanting,

see the flowers blooming,

the blue sky,

the white clouds,

the smile and the marvelous look

of your beloved.

You, the richest person on Earth,

who have been going around begging for a living,

stop being a destitute child.

Come back and claim your heritage.

We should enjoy our happiness,

and offer it to everyone else.

Cherish this very moment.

Let go of the stream of distress,

and embrace life fully in your arms.

Reading *The Female Cardinal* by Wally Swist Read by Inez A

Watching the birds this morning use the budding
adolescent maple as a stage from which they

 dive to the ground and then rise up again, I see
 the blue jay with all his braggadocio, flutter
and fluster on the branches, and poke his beak
among the leaf litter, then leave; a mourning dove,

 in all of its natural coyness, coo and peck, then
 alight upon the driveway's crushed black basalt
where it selects flecks of grain no other bird seems
to be able to find; but then a female cardinal

 begins her flight-dance among the maple's limbs,
 charming in her practical but fashionable colors –
wearing her rouge liming just the edges
of her wings and highlighting the top of her head;

 with just enough mascara to accentuate
 the sparkle of her eyes; her beak sun-colored with
an element of gold; her feathers not the bright red
of her male counterpart, but she wouldn't have it
 otherwise, since she blends her feathers within

her environment with their rich shades of beige
and brown. There she is not missing a windblown
seed among last autumn's mottled leaves, adept
and confident, obviously feeling quite smart,
in her avian regalia, apparently not out to beat up,
on the boys, and to cackle about it later, since
that is not her way, but yielding to the female
principle inherent within her as she gives way
to the puddles in the culvert by hopping around them.
She gains strength in herself by not trying to be
what she is not, and discovering the deep parity
in that, as she answers the whistle of her mate,
the delight evident in her tone, and as cardinals
do, whistles her response back, as if to say, *I'm
over here. What else is new? And what about you?*

Reading *A Bird Came Down the Path* by Emily Dickinson Read by Judith Wright

A Bird came down the Walk —
He did not know I saw —
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,

And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass —
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass —

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all around —
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought —
He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers

And rowed him softer home —

Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam —
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
Leap, splashless as they swim.

Reading *I Dream of Trees* by Mary Oliver Read by Kim R

There is a thing in me that dreamed of trees,
A quiet house, some green and modest acres
A little way from every troubling town,
A little way from factories, schools, laments.
I would have time, I thought, and time to spare,
With only streams and birds for company,
To build out of my life a few wild stanzas.
And then it came to me, that so was death,
A little way away from everywhere.

There is a thing in me still dreams of trees.
But let it go. Homesick for moderation,
Half the world's artists shrink or fall away.
If any find solution, let him tell it.
Meanwhile I bend my heart toward lamentation
Where, as the times implore our true involvement,
The blades of every crisis point the way.

I would it were not so, but so it is.
Whoever made music of a mild day?

Reading *A Letter in Return* by Lynn Ungar Read by Shirley R

And how do you live and what are your fears during this crisis?

What a question to surface
After midnight from across the world!
In your country is it the time of day
to wrestle all the existential and daily dreads
until, like Jacob and the vicious angel
they concede to bless us?

I am afraid that people I love will die.
I am afraid that my child is inheriting a world
so much harsher than what she deserves.
I am afraid that desperate times call
for desperate measures and I
am not quite desperate enough.

Should I go on? I am afraid
that people have wandered away
from the very idea of truth.
I am afraid we have unlearned
how to speak and how to listen.
I am afraid the fabric that hold us together
is woven more loosely that I thought
and people keep slipping through.

And how do you live?

With grief. With fear. With laughter.
With boredom. With glee. With contentment.
With fury. With hope.
With the firm conviction that no thing
cancels any other thing out.
Death does not cancel life.
Grief does not cancel joy.
Fear does not cancel conviction.
Nor any of those statements in reverse.
Make your heart a bowl

that is large enough to hold it all.

Imagine that you are the potter.

Stretch the clay. Cherish the turning of the wheel.

Accept that the bowl

is never going to be done.

Reading *Let Evening Come* by Jane Kenyon Read by Patricia S

Let the light of late afternoon
shine through chinks in the barn, moving
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing
as a woman takes up her needles
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned
in long grass. Let the stars appear
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.
Let the wind die down. Let the shed
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop
in the oats, to air in the lung
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't
be afraid. God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come.

Reading *A river cannot go back* by Kahlil Gibran Read by Kim R

It is said that before entering the sea
a river trembles with fear.

She looks back at the path she has traveled,
from the peaks of the mountains,
the long winding road crossing forests and villages.

And in front of her,

she sees an ocean so vast,
that to enter
there seems nothing more than to disappear forever.
But there is no other way.
The river cannot go back.
Nobody can go back.
To go back is impossible in existence.
The river needs to take the risk
of entering the ocean
because only then will fear disappear,
because that's where the river will know
it's not about disappearing into the ocean,
but of becoming the ocean.

Reading

Smart Cookie by Richard Schiffman

Read by Shirley R

The fortune that you seek is in another cookie,
Was my fortune. So, I'll be equally frank-the wisdom,
That you covet is in another poem. The life that you desire,
Is in a different universe. The cookie you are craving,
Is in another jar. The jar is buried somewhere in Tennessee.
Don't even think of searching for it. If you found the jar,
Everything would go kerflooy for a thousand miles around.
It is the jar of your fate in an alternate reality. Don't even think,
Of living that life. Don't even think of eating that cookie.
Be a smart cookie-eat what's on your plate, not in, some jar,
In Tennessee. That's my wisdom for today, though I know,
It's not what you were looking for.

Closing Poem

Prayer Found Above the Doorway of a County Inn by Rudy Nemser

May you always hear
The song of the wren
Who sings nowhere else.
May you keep with you
the smell of the deep red rose
which blooms nowhere else.

May your days and nights be cheered,
by the laughter you have shared.
May your steps be lightened,
with knowledge of love
that awaits your arrival.

May you never forget,
once you were stranger
where now you belong.

When you leave,
you take part of us with you.
When you leave,
part of you remains.

May you remember until you return.