

PSALMS & POETRY

“Protestant Spirituality” (Webber)

Academy #42 – Camp McDowell (April 8-13, 2024)

PSALMS**Sources**

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Fingerprints on Every Moment: 40 Psalm-Prayers in Contemplative Voice (Houston: The Center for Christian Spirituality, 2010).

A Surprising Companionship: 40 Psalm-Prayers in Contemplative Voice (Houston: The Center for Christian Spirituality, 2014).

Psalm 4 (Fischer)

Because I call
 You answer
 for you are fitting
 Because I am small
 You enlarge me
 For you are gracious
 You hear my song . . .

People, tremble
 And be upright
 Commune with your hearts
 In the deep of night
 Awake on your beds

Be still:
 Offer that
 For it is fitting

Trust it
For it is the rightness
Of all that is

People say
Who will bring us
What we need?
Who will beam
Heaven's light
On us?

But already
My heart has more joy
Than full granaries
And wineries
Could provide

And I will lie down
To sleep
With a deep peace
For in you
I find my completion

Psalm 13 (Mitchell)

How long will this pain go on, Lord,
 this grief I can hardly bear?
How long will anguish grip me
 and agony wring my mind?
Light up my eyes with your presence;
 let me feel your love in my bones.
Keep me from losing myself
 in ignorance and despair.
Teach me to be patient, Lord;
 teach me to be endlessly patient.
Let me trust that your love enfolds me
 when my heart feels desolate and dry.
I will sing to the Lord at all times,
 even from the depths of pain.

Psalm 15 (Mitchell)

Lord, who can be trusted with power,
 And who may act in your place?
Those with a passion for justice,
 Who speak the truth from their hearts;

Who have let go of selfish interests
 And grown beyond their own lives;
 Who see the wretched as their family
 And the poor as their flesh and blood.
 They alone are impartial
 And worthy of the people's trust.
 Their compassion lights up the whole earth,
 And their kindness endures forever.

Psalm 16 (Merrill)

Remain ever before me, O Living Presence,
 for in You am I safe.
 You are my Beloved; in You
 I can do all things.

I look to those who are at one with You and
 learn from them of your ways;
 My delight increases each time
 I sense your presence within me!
 Songs of praise well up from my heart!

Love is my chosen food, my cup,
 holding me in its power.
 Where I have come from
 Where'er I shall go,
 Love is my birthright, my true estate.

I bless the Counselor who guides my way;
 in the night also does my heart instruct me.
 I walk beside the Spirit of Truth;
 I celebrate the Light.

Thus my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
 I shall not be afraid,
 nor fall into the pit of despair;
 In Love's presence there is fullness of joy.

You are my Beloved; in You will I live!

Psalm 19 (Mitchell)

The heavens declare God's grandeur
 and the radiance from which they arise.

Each dawn tells of his beauty;
 each night shines with his grace.
 Their testimony speaks to the whole world
 and reaches to the ends of the earth.
 In them is a path for the sun,
 who steps forth handsome as a bridegroom
 and rejoices like an athlete as he runs.
 He starts at one end of the heavens
 and circles to the other end,
 and nothing can hide from his heat.

God's universe is perfect, awing the mind.
 God's truth is subtle, baffling the intellect.
 God's law is total, quickening the breath.
 God's compassion is fathomless, refreshing the soul.
 God's justice is absolute, lighting up the eyes.
 God's love is radiant, rejoicing the heart,
 more precious than the finest gold
 sweeter than honey from the comb.

Help me to be aware of my selfishness,
 but without undue shame or self-judgment.
 Let me know that you are always present,
 in every atom of my life.
 Let me keep surrendering my self
 until I am utterly transparent.
 Let my words be rooted in honesty
 and my thoughts be lost in your light,
 Unnameable God, my essence,
 my origin, my life-blood, my home.

Psalm 19:1 – 4 Psalm-Prayer (Webber)

a psalm of story-telling

The ducks and stars
 oaks and rabbits
 still ponds and night-cereus
 all tell Your story
 and display Your artisanship

Light speaks to light
 Darkness teaches the next darkness

They have no words
but their silence is a shout

They speak the language of being

Their testimony spreads far

Their message of the God-life
told day after day
night after night

I, too, have a story to tell
with my lips
with my life

Here it is . . .

Psalm 23 (Rosenberg)

The Lord is my shepherd
and keeps me from wanting
what I can't have

lush green grass is set
around me and crystal water
to graze by

there I revive with my soul
find the way that love makes
for his name and though I pass

through cities of pain, through death's living shadow
I'm not afraid to touch
to know what I am

your shepherd's staff is always there
to keep me calm
in my body

you set a table before me
in the presence of my enemies
you give me grace to speak

to quiet them
to be full with humanness
to be warm in my soul's lightness

to feel contact every day

in my hand and in my belly
love coming down to me

in the air of your name, Lord
in your house
in my life.

Psalm 24 (Webber)

Always and everywhere
You are
Every time is Yours
and every place
Earth, world, universe
People, every race and tribe
Four-footed beasts, winged' fowl, fish
Mountains and marshes
oceans and plains
Always and everywhere
You are

So who is the one aware of Your presence?
Who acknowledges You in the world?
The one with open hands and a quiet heart
The one humbly rooted in the ground of their truth
The one who can hear You in utter silence
and see You in the darkest nights
The one who lays aside self-interest
and does not perpetuate the lie
that dollars rule
that bigger is better
that success is measurable
that others exist to serve me

Such a person lives in fullness of life
they bless others
and bless the world

Open wide, you door of my heart
Swing wide, you long-closed gates
Your Heart-lover
Your Soul-shaper
lays siege to you
silently awaiting an opening to enter

Who is this Heart-lover
 Who is this Soul-shaper
 who besieges me?
 The Glorious One
 my Beloved
 my Friend

Open wide, you door of my heart
 Swing wide, you long-closed gates
 Your Heart-lover
 Your Soul-shaper
 lays siege to you
 silently awaiting an opening to enter

Who is this Heart-lover
 Who is this Soul-shaper
 who besieges me?

Ahhh, my Beloved
 my Friend
 it's You,
 You at last.

Come in.

Psalm 29 Prayer (Webber)

Your voice shouts
 whispers
 blaring silences
 declaring Presence
 and Absence
 Inviting me to shouts
 for just living
 to whispers
 for imbibing oneness

Over the waters
 through the trees
 Your whispered shouts
 animating all created things
 always
 and
 everywhere

Your speech creates
 You shape our becoming
 You shower the world
 with Your Self
 generously Self-giving
 extravagantly giving away
 what it means to be God

Ssshhh my heart
 be still
 silent
 listen

Your lover appears
 comes
 woos
 quietly, relentless
 to bring you home
 to shepherd you on
 to give you back
 your self.

Psalm 37 (Fischer)

Trust what is and do good
 Be where you are in truthfulness
 Take delight in what is
 And your heart's desire will be fulfilled

Be committed to life
 Trust what is
 And all will be as it must be
 And your rightness will shine forth as the dawn
 And your goodness as the sun at high noon

Be quiet before what is
 Wait patiently and simply
 Don't worry about those who easily prosper
 The manipulators and seducers

Wait, wait with what is
 Live in accord with it –

Those who choose this way will be the world's lovers

But the heedless, the crossers of what is
 Those who veer off, falling away, take apart –
 They disappear together
 Their future is cut off

As for the upright – you are their salvation
 Their strength in times of distress
 You help them, rescue them, make them whole
 Rescue them from heedlessness
 Keep them safe
 Because they are the ones
 Who have trusted you
 Who've given themselves wholly over
 To waiting with what is

Psalm 46 (Mitchell)

God is our refuge and strength,
 our safety in times of trouble.
 We are calm though the whole world trembles
 and the cliffs fall into the sea.
 Our trust is in the Unnamable,
 the God who makes all things right.

Come see what the Lord has created,
 the miracles he does for humankind,
 He puts an end to our wars
 and snaps our weapons like twigs.
 He offers us his abundance
 and his peace, to the ends of the earth.
 He whispers to the heart, “Be still
 and know that I am within you.”

Our trust is in the Unnamable,
 the God who makes all things right.

Psalm 62 (Merrill)

For You alone my soul waits in silence;
 from the Beloved comes my salvation.
 Enfolding me with strength and steadfast love,
 my faith shall remain firm.

Yet, how long will fear rule my life,
 holding me in its grip like
 a trembling child,
 a dark and lonely grave?

Fear keeps me from living fully, from sharing my gifts;
 it takes pleasure in imprisoning my soul.
 Fear pretends to comfort, so long has it dwelled within me;
 truly, it is my enemy.

For You alone my soul waits in silence;
 my hope is from the Beloved.
 Enfolding me with strength and steadfast love,
 my faith shall remain firm.
 In the Silence rests my freedom and my guidance;
 You are the Heart of my heart,
 my refuge is in the Silence.

Trust in Love at all times, O people;
 pour out your heart to the Beloved;
 Let Silence be a refuge for you.

Psalm 62:5 – 12 (Garnaas-Holmes)

Beloved, for you my soul waits in silence.
 My hope is hidden in your silence.
 Life of my living, you are my earth.
 You are what cannot be taken.
 In the gravity of your grace I rest.
 In your silence is my deep belonging.

I trust in you, Holy One.
 I pour myself into your hands,
 into this light, my resting place.

Rich or poor mean nothing;
 they are an illusion.
 I abandon my little “happy” and “sad.”
 They are both lint.
 Do I catch myself trying to gain?
 Ah, ignore all that fool’s gold.
 Ignore it. Let it go.

I keep hearing this in the silence;
 the silence says it over and over:
 the only power is Love,
 and love, all love, is God.

Beloved, you live, you speak, you resound
 in all we do.

Psalm 107:4 – 9 (Webber)

Lost in a wasteland
I wandered

No landmarks to lead me home
No discernible path to a dwelling place

Driven on by hunger, thirst
desiring more
the inner fire flickering within

Crying out in my lostness
seeking help in the darkness

And then . . .
. . . an unexpected presence!
. . . a surprising companionship!

The way did not come clear
but I felt myself accompanied

I saw just one next step
of the path
appear before me
not knowing where it led
yet trusting it
to carry me home

So met by mercy
I offer You thanks
A receiver of compassion
I am grateful

Lost in a wasteland
You uncovered a path onward
Blind in the darkness
You beamed a glimmer of light
Hungry for more
You wafted the faintest aroma of peace

Lip-praise
And life-praise
to You
my Surprising Companion

Psalm 123 (Fischer)

Up toward you
 I lift my eyes:
 Look!
 As manservants raise eyes toward masters
 As maidservants raise eyes toward mistresses
 Humble and expectant
 In reflected gratefulness
 So do we direct our gaze
 Up to you

Reflect in our souls your clear light
 Enlarge our hearts

For we are diminished and dimmed with the world's opinions
 Diminished and dimmed with possession and worry
 With accomplishment's undertow
 With reputation's crazy wind
 Oppressed by the disdain of other
 Inside and out

Psalm 125 (Merrill)

Those who put their trust in You are like giant trees
 standing firm and rooted deep.
 As the trees grow strong in fertile soil,
 so we mature in the garden of Love,
 nourished by the Word of Life.
 For the weeds of fear, the tares of ignorance,
 find no home here; they are soon cast out.
 As each flower in its uniqueness blesses the garden,
 the interconnectedness of all brings it to fulfillment.
 Those whose lives reflect goodness and integrity,
 become mirrors to Love's way.
 They are like fragrant blossoms that
 bring joy to all around them,
 like open invitations for others to come.
 Come! Enter the Garden of Love!

Psalm 130 (Fischer)

Out of the depths I call to you
 Listen to my voice
 Be attentive to my supplicating voice

If you tallied errors
 Who would survive the count?
 But you forgive, you forbear everything
 And this is the wonder and the dread

You are my heart's hope, my daily hope
 And my ears long to hear your words
 My heart waits quiet in hope for you
 More than they who watch for sunrise
 Hope for a new morning

Let those who question and struggle
 Wait quiet like this for you
 For with you there is durable kindness
 And wholeness in abundance
 And you will loose all our bindings
 Surely

Psalm 131 (Fischer)

You know that my heart is not haughty
 Nor my eyes lofty
 Neither have I reached for things
 Too great and too wonderful for me

But I have calmed and settled my heart
 And it is contented

Like a child surfeited on a mother's breast
 Like a suckling child is my heart

Let those who question and struggle
 Wait quiet like this for you
 From this day forth
 And always

Psalm 131 (Mitchell)

My mind is not noisy with desires, Lord,
 and my heart has satisfied its longing.
 I do not care about religion
 or anything that is not you.

I have soothed and quieted my soul,
like a child at its mother's breast.
My soul is as peaceful as a child
sleeping in its mother's arms.

PSALM 131 (Webber)

God, we are not proud.
We are no better or worse than anyone else.
We are who we are.
We do not occupy ourselves with great matters
or with things that are beyond our understanding.
We offer ourselves to You.
We still our hearts and quiet our souls.
Like a child content upon its mother's breast,
our souls are quiet and content within us.
With all Your children,
we wait upon You,
from now until for evermore.

Psalm 133 (Rosenberg)

It's so good, the turn of a season
people living for a moment as equals
secure in the human family

as sweet as spring rain
making the beard silky
Aaron's beard

his robes sparkle
rich with heaven's simple jewels
like the crown of dew

on Lebanon's Mt. Hermon
shared equally on the hills
of Israel

where the Lord graces our eyes
fresh from reborn wonder
as if we'd live forever.

Psalm 139 (Webber)

O Lord of light, You shine the searchlight of your love into my life;
 You illumine my life with your brightness;
 You know everything there is to know about where I go,
 what I do,
 and who I am.

Sometimes I walk a well-trod path,
 and sometimes I venture out where there is no trail to follow.
 Wherever I am, You find me,
 in order to guide my steps.

Though my journey may seem frightening to me,
 it is not unknown to You.
 Even when I don't know my way,
 I am not lost to You.
 You are in front of me and You are behind me,
 surrounding me with love wherever I go.
 Your strength and peace are constant companions,
 as if You laid a hand on my shoulders yourself,
 as if You were closer to me than my next breath.
 I can't go anywhere to be away from You.
 I can't shake your encompassing Spirit.
 Whether I go to the heights or the depths,
 to the east or to the west,
 You are still present to me.

I may soar with the eagles or be in the deepest agony,
 and even then your hands hold me fearlessly;
 You embrace me in determined love.

Psalm 144:13 – 16 (Webber)

*May our barns be filled
 with crops of every kind.
 May the flocks in our fields multiply by the thousands,
 even tens of thousands,
 and may our oxen be loaded down with produce.
 May there be no enemy breaking through our walls,
 no going into captivity,
 no cries of alarm in our town squares.
 Yes, joyful are those who live like this!
 Joyful indeed are those whose God is the LORD. (NLB)*

Read the ancient prayers,
 the ones about smooth roads
 and unending increase,

where everything turns out
 cozy in the end
 after a few well-spoken
 words and maybe a
 simple genuflect
 or two,
 prosperity measured out
 in bushels of harvest
 and quivers-full
 of sons and daughters
 preparing to take over the
 business of running the farm.

Who doesn't want this
 and
 Who wouldn't sell her
 soul for a few days
 of well-being – or maybe
 a life – and

Who among us is exempt
 from begging of the gods
 the very things
 that leave us
 as we are.

POETRY

The Lightest Touch (David Whyte)

Good poetry begins with
 the lightest touch,
 a breeze arriving from nowhere,
 a whispered healing arrival,
 a word in your ear,
 a settling into things,
 then like a hand in the dark
 it arrests the whole body,
 steeling you for revelation.

In the silence that follows
 a great line
 you can feel Lazarus
 deep inside
 even the laziest, most deathly afraid
 part of you,
 lift up his hands and walk toward the light.

[David Whyte, *Everything Is Waiting for You* (Langley, WA: Many Rivers Press, 2003), 3.]

How to Write a Poem: Celebrating Naomi Shihab Nye (Kwame Alexander)

Hush.

Grab a pencil
some paper
spunk.

Let loose your heart –
raise your voice.

What if I have many voices?

Let them dance together
twist and turn
like best friends
in a maze
till you find
your way
to that one true word

(or two).

[Kwame Alexander, *Out of Wonder: Poems Celebrating Poets* (Candlewick Press, 2021), p. 3.]

Introduction to Poetry (Billy Collins)

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

[Billy Collins, *Sailing Alone around the Room* (New York: Random House, 2002), p. 16.]

Fluent (John O'Donohue)

I would love to live
 Like a river flows,
 Carried by the surprise
 Of its own unfolding.

[John O'Donohue, *Conamara Blues* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 2001), p. 23.]

The Secret (Denise Levertov)

Two girls discover
 the secret of life
 in a sudden line of
 poetry.

I who don't know the
 secret wrote
 the line. They
 told me

(through a third person)
 they had found it
 but not what it was
 not even

what line it was. No doubt
 by now, more than a week
 later, they have forgotten
 the secret,

the line, the name of
 the poem. I love them

for finding what
 I can't find,

and for loving me
 for the line I wrote,
 and for forgetting it
 so that

a thousand times, till death
 finds them, they may
 discover it again, in other
 lines

in other
 happenings. And for
 wanting to know it,
 for

assuming there is
 such a secret, yes,
 for that
 most of all.

[Denise Levertov, *Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions Books, 2002), 33 – 34.]

I Want to Write Something So Simply (Mary Oliver)

I want to write something
 so simply
 about love
 or about pain
 that even
 as you are reading
 you feel it

and as you read
 you keep feeling it
 and though it be my story
 it will be common,
 though it be singular
 it will be known to you
 so that by the end
 you will think –
 no, you will realize –
 that it was all the while
 yourself arranging the words,
 that it was all the time
 words that you yourself,
 out of your own heart
 had been saying.

[Mary Oliver, *Evidence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 42]

The Man at the Door (Robert Bly)

Last night in my dream I took some steps
 Underground. It seemed to be a holy place –
 Perhaps monks a thousand years ago
 Thought there. I had almost forgotten them.

How could we forget? Well, it's easy.
 A guard at the door – you know the kind,
 Those who keep people out – stopped me.
 I began singing, “Hum-du-lah,

“Hum-du-lah.” I couldn't remember
 What those words meant.
 But the man at the door grew
 Light-headed, and let me slip in.

[Robert Bly, *Stealing Sugar from the Castle* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), p. 348.]

Where Does the Temple Begin, Where Does It End? (Mary Oliver)

There are things you can't reach. But
 you can reach out to them, and all day long.

The wind, the bird flying away. The idea of God.

And it can keep you as busy as anything else, and happier.

The snake slides away; the fish jumps, like a little lily,

out of the water and back in; the goldfinches sing
from the unreachable top of the tree.

I look; morning to night I am never done with looking.

Looking I mean not just standing around, but standing around
as though with your arms open.

And thinking; maybe something will come, some
shining coil of wind,
or a few leaves from any old tree –
they are all in this too.

And now I will tell you the truth.
Everything in the world
comes.

At least, closer.

And, cordially.

Like the nibbling, tinsel-eyed fish; the unlooping snake.
Like goldfinches, little dolls of gold
fluttering around the corner of the sky

of God, the blue air.

[Mary Oliver, *Why I Wake Early* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), pp. 8 – 9.]

The Way In (Rainer Maria Rilke)

Whoever you are: some evening take a step
out of your house, which you know so well.
Enormous space is near, your house lies where it begins,
whoever you are.
Your eyes find it hard to tear themselves
from the sloping threshold, but with your eyes
slowly, slowly, lift one black tree
up, so it stands against the sky: skinny, alone.
With that you have made the world. The world is immense
and like a word that is still growing in the silence.
In the same moment that your will grasps it,
your eyes, feeling its subtlety, will leave it. . . .

[*Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. by Robert Bly (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 71.]

The Journey (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.

[Mary Oliver, *Dream Work* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), pp. 38-39.]

God speaks to each of us as he makes us (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 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.

[Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, trans. by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy, 88.]

The Beauty We Love (Rumi)

Today, like every day.
We wake up hollow and frightened.
Don't open the door to the study and begin reading.
Reach for a musical instrument.
Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

A Traveler (Denise Levertov)

If it's chariots or sandals,
I'll take sandals.
I like the high prow of the chariot,
the daredevil speed, the wind
a quick tune you can't
quite catch
 but I want to go
a long way
and I want to follow
paths where wheels deadlock.
 And I don't want always
to be among gear and horses,
 blood, foam, dust. I'd like
to wean myself from their strange allure.
I'll chance
the pilgrim sandals.

[Denise Levertov, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Paul A. Lacey (New York: New Directions Books, 2002), p. 172.]

The Way It Is (William Stafford)

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder what you're pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.

[William Stafford, *The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems* (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1977), p. 42.]

God's Wounds (Mark Nepo)

Through the great pain of stretching
beyond all that pain has taught me,
the soft well at the base
has opened, and life
touching me there
has turned me into a flower
that prays for rain. Now
I understand: to blossom
is to pray, to wilt and shed
is to pray, to turn to mulch

is to pray, to stretch in the dark
is to pray, to break surface
after great months of ice
is to pray, and to squeeze love
up the stalky center toward the sky
with only dreams of color
is to pray, and finally to unfold
again as if never before
is to be the prayer.

Things to Think (Robert Bly)

Think in ways you've never thought before.
If the phone rings, think of it as carrying a message
Larger than anything you've ever heard,
Vaster than a hundred lines of Yeats.

Think that someone may bring a bear to your door,
Maybe wounded and deranged; or think that a moose
Has risen out of the lake, and he's carrying on his antlers
A child of your own whom you've never seen.

When someone knocks on the door, think that he's about
To give you something large; tell you you're forgiven,
Or that it's not necessary to work all the time, or that it's
Been decided that if you lie down no one will die.

[Robert Bly, *Morning Poems* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 12.]

Act III, Scene ii (Madeleine L'Engle)

Someone has altered the script.
 My lines have been changed.
 The other actors are shifting roles.
 They don't come on when they're expected to,
 and they don't say the lines I've written
 and I'm being upstaged.
 I thought I was writing this play
 with a rather nice role for myself,
 small, but juicy
 and some excellent lines.
 But nobody gives me my cues
 and the scenery has been replaced
 and I don't recognize the new sets.
 This isn't the script I was writing.
 I don't understand this play at all.

To grow up
 is to find
 the small part you are playing
 in this extraordinary drama
 written by
 somebody else.

[Madeleine L'Engle, *The Ordering of Love*.]

Fighting the Instrument (Mark Nepo)

Often the instruments of change
 are not kind or just
 and the hardest openness
 of all might be
 to embrace the change
 while not wasting your heart
 fighting the instrument.

The storm is not as important
 as the path it opens.
 The mistreatment in one life
 never as crucial as the clearing
 it makes in your heart.

This is very difficult to accept.
 The hammer or cruel one
 is always short-lived
 compared to the jewel
 in the center of the stone.

Lost (David Wagoner)

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

[David Wagoner, *Collected Poems 1956-1976*.]

Don't bother to ask (Gregory Orr)

Don't bother to ask
For the Book at the library:
It's always checked out.
You'd have to conclude
No one ever returns it.

Better to put together
Your own version:
The poems and songs
You love – the ones
That saved you when
You were young
And suffered.

 And also
Those that consoled you
When you were older.

[Gregory Orr, *How Beautiful the Beloved* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2009), 13.]

If you're an oak (Basho)

*If you're an oak
you don't pretend
you are a flower*

[Basho, *Moon Woke Me Up Nine Times: Selected Haiku of Basho*, trans. by David Young, 31.]

The Swan (Rainer Maria Rilke)

This clumsy living that moves lumbering
as if in ropes through what is not done
reminds us of the awkward way the swan walks.

And to die, which is a letting go
of the ground we stand on and cling to every day,
is like the swan when he nervously lets himself down

into the water, which receives him gaily
and which flows joyfully under
and after him, waver after wave,
while the swan, unmoving and marvelously calm,
is pleased to be carried, each minute more fully grown,
more like a king, composed, farther and farther on.

[Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke, trans. by Robert Bly (New York: Harper&Row, 1981), p. 141.]

Ask Me (William Stafford)

Some time when the river is ice ask me
mistakes I have made. Ask me whether
what I have done is my life. Others
have come in their slow way into
my thought, and some have tried to help
or to hurt: ask me what difference
their strongest love or hate has made.
I will listen to what you say.
You and I can turn and look
at the silent river and wait. We know
the current is there, hidden; and there
are comings and goings from miles away
that hold the stillness exactly before us.
What the river says, that is what I say.

[William Stafford, *The Way It Is: New & Selected Poems*, (St. Paul, MN: Graywolf, 1998), 56.]

Prayer (Galway Kinnell)

Whatever happens. Whatever
what is is is what
I want. Only that. But that.

[Galway Kinnell, *A New Selected Poems* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 2000), p. 116.]

What is. (Jerry Webber)

How easily
 I have loved
 the idyllic

For its peace
 the beauty it speaks
 into my darkness

This love for what
 I want the world
 to be

But then the tragic
 the devastation
 and terror

Life gone out
 of control
 rising waters
 burning brush
 drought-stricken relationships

The inclination to love
 only one side
 that pleases me

And delights me
 without loving
 the whole.

Love loves
 what is
 as it is

Sabbaths 2001 (Wendell Berry)

The question before me, now that I
 am old, is not how to be dead,
 which I know from enough practice,
 but how to be alive, as these worn
 hills still tell, and some paintings
 of Paul Cezanne, and this mere
 singing wren, who thinks he's alive
 forever, this instant, and may be.

[Wendell Berry, *Given: Poems* (Washington, DC: Shoemaker-Hoard, 2005), p. 100.]

“It’s heavy to drag, this big sack . . .” (William Stafford)

It’s heavy to drag, this big sack of what
you should have done. And finally
you can’t lift it any more.
Someone says, “Come on,” and you
just look at them. Trees are waiting,
mountains. You never intended
that it should come to this.

But Now has arrived and is looking
straight at you, the way a lion does
when thinking it over, and anything
can happen. It’s time for the cavalry
or maybe the Lone Ranger. But they
won’t come. Maybe the music will
spill over and start it all again.
Maybe.

[William Stafford, *The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems* (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1998), 36.]

The Guest House (Rumi)

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture, still,
treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

[Rumi: *The Book of Love*, trans. by Coleman Barks (New York: HarperOne, 2003), pp. 179 – 180.]

The Summer Day (Mary Oliver)

Who made the world?
 Who made the swan, and the black bear?
 Who made the grasshopper?
 This grasshopper, I mean —
 the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
 the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
 who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down —
 who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
 Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
 Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
 I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
 I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
 into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
 how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
 which is what I have been doing all day.
 Tell me, what else should I have done?
 Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
 Tell me, what is it you plan to do
 with your one wild and precious life?

[Mary Oliver, *House of Light* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), p. 60.]

The Vacation (Wendell Berry)

Once there was a man who filmed his vacation.
 He went flying down the river in his boat
 with his video camera to his eye, making
 a moving picture of the moving river
 upon which his sleek boat moved swiftly
 toward the end of his vacation. He showed
 his vacation to his camera, which pictured it,
 preserving it forever: the river, the trees,
 the sky, the light, the bow of his rushing boat
 behind which he stood with his camera
 preserving his vacation even as he was having it
 so that after he had had it he would still
 have it. It would be there. With a flick
 of a switch, there it would be. But he
 would not be in it. He would never be in it.

[*The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998), 157.]

There are no rules now (Jane Bishop)

There are no rules now.
 You who bore me, taught me, raised me,
 Mother, Father, friends, lovers,
 You are my brothers and sisters now.

All that you taught me to help me in life
 Is no longer true, unless I find it so.
 Your truths for you, mine for me.

But I, being some part child still,
 Grieve for the missing parents to be no more,
 Nor to be a parent myself.
 No longer even a child of God but co-creator.

This is frightening.
 This is glorious.

[In Mark Nepo, *The Exquisite Risk* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), p. 195.]

Say Yes Quickly (Rumi, trans. by Coleman Barks)

Forget your life. Say *God is Great*. Get up.
 You think you know what time it is. It's time to pray.
 You've carved so many little figurines, too many.
 Don't knock on any random door like a beggar.
 Reach your long hand out to another door, beyond where
 you go on the street, the street
 where everyone says, "How are you?"
 and no one says *How aren't you?*

Tomorrow you'll see what you've broken and torn tonight,
 thrashing in the dark. Inside you
 there's an artist you don't know about.
 He's not interested in how things look different in moon-light.

If you are here unfaithfully with us,
 you're causing terrible damage.
 If you've opened your loving to God's love,
 you're helping people you don't know
 and have never seen.

Is what I say true? Say yes quickly,
 if you know, if you've known it
 from before the beginning of the universe.

[“Say Yes Quickly,” trans. by Coleman Barks, in *The Soul Is Here for Its Own Joy*, ed. by Robert Bly (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1995), p. 157.]

Eternity (William Blake)

He who binds to himself a joy
 Does the winged life destroy:
 But he who kisses the joy as it flies
 Lives in eternity's sunrise.

Once Only (Denise Levertov)

All which, because it was
 flame and song and granted us
 joy, we thought we'd do, be, revisit,
 turns out to have been what it was
 that *once*, only; every initiation
 did not begin
 a series, a build-up: the marvelous
 did happen in our lives, our stories
 are not drab with its absence: but don't
 expect now to return for more. Whatever more
 there will be will be
 unique as those were unique. Try
 to acknowledge the next
 song in its body-halo of flames as utterly
 present, as now or never.

[Denise Levertov, *This Great Unknowing: Last Poems* (New York: New Directions Books, 1999), 46.]

We must become ignorant (Rumi)

We must become ignorant
 Of all we've been taught,
 And be, instead, bewildered.

Run from what's profitable and comfortable
 If you drink those liqueurs, you'll spill
 The spring water of your real life.

Forget safety.
 Live where you fear to live.
 Destroy your reputation.
 Be notorious.

I have tried prudent planning
 Long enough, from now
 On, I'll live mad.

Isn't That Something? (Rumi)

I
 like when
 the music happens like this:
 Something in His eye grabs hold of a
 tambourine in
 me,
 then I turn and lift a violin in someone else,
 and they turn, and this turning
 continues,
 it has
 reached you now. Isn't that
 something?

Do you know what you are? (Rumi)

Do you know what you are?
 You are a manuscript of a divine letter.
 You are a mirror reflecting a noble face.
 This universe is not outside of you.
 Look inside yourself;
 everything that you want,
 you are already that.

[*Hush, Don't Say Anything to God: Passionate Poems of Rumi*, ed. by Shahram Shiva (Fremont, CA: Jain Publishing, 2000), p. 29.]

from Moral Proverbs and Tiny Songs (Antonio Machado, trans. by Robert Bly)

I
 Don't trace out your profile –
 forget your side view –
 all that is outer stuff.

II
 Look for your other half
 who walks always next to you
 and tends to be who you aren't.

III
 Narcissism
 is an ugly fault,
 and now it's a boring fault too.

IV

But look in your mirror for the other one,
the other one who walks by your side.

[in *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart*, Robert Bly, James Hillman, and Michael Meade, eds. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), p. 366.]

Find (Rabbi Rachel Barenblat)

If I had any pull with God, everything you need
would appear right now in front of you.
A door would open and inside it
a rose-strewn path, the yearned-for embrace.
I'd take the broken pieces of the *afikomen*
and restore them as if by magic.

But that isn't how God works. God isn't
a diner waitress saying what can I get you, hon?
That's why our sages taught: a clay vessel
is purified when it breaks and is glued.
A human heart, charged with a lifetime's losses
Becomes real when lovingly mended.
All I can do: ask God to cradle your heart
in Her own hands and make you whole.

The Place Where We Are Right (Yehuda Amichai, trans. Stephen Mitchell)

From the place where we are right
flowers will never grow
in the spring.

The place where we are right
is hard and trampled
like a yard.

But doubts and loves
dig up the world
like a mole, a plow.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
where the ruined
house once stood.

[in *Poetry Unbound: 50 poems to Open Your World*, ed. by Padraig O'Tuama (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2023), p. 290.]

Now is the Time (Hafiz, trans. by Daniel Ladinsky)

Now is the time to know
That all that you do is sacred.

Now, why not consider
A lasting truce with yourself and God.

Now is the time to understand
That all your ideas of right and wrong
Were just a child's training wheels
To be laid aside
When you finally live
With veracity
And love.

Hafiz is a divine envoy
Whom the Beloved
Has written a holy message upon.

My dear, please tell me
Why do you still
Throw sticks at your heart
And God?

What is it in that sweet voice inside
That incites you to fear?

Now is the time for the world to know
That every thought and action is sacred.

This is the time
For you to deeply compute the impossibility
That there is anything
But grace.

Now is the season to know
That everything you do
Is sacred.

[*Poetry of Presence: An Anthology of Mindfulness Poems*, eds. Phyllis Cole-Dai & Ruby R. Wilson (West Hartford, CT: Grayson Books, 2017), p. 110.]

The Way It is (Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer)

Over and over we break
open, we break and
we break and we open.
For a while, we try to fix
the vessel – as if
to be broken is bad.
As if with glue and tape
and a steady hand we
might bring things to perfect
again. As if they were ever
perfect. As if to be broken is not
also perfect. As if to be open
is not the path toward joy.
The vase that’s been shattered
and cracked will never
hold water. Eventually
it will leak. And at some
point, perhaps, we decide
that we’re done with picking
our flowers anyways, and no
longer need a place to contain them.
We watch them grow just
as wildflowers do – unfenced,
unmanaged, blossoming only
when they’re ready – and my god,
how beautiful they are amidst
the mounting pile of shards.

[Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer, <https://ahundredfallingveils.com/>]

Axioms of Wildness (John O'Donohue)

Feel the favor of the earth.

With the music inside,
Dance like there is no outside.

Become subtle enough
To hear a tree breathe.

Try to watch a painting from within:
How it holds what it never shows.

See your imagination dawn
Around the rim of your world.

Succumb to warmth in the heart
Where divine fire glows.

[John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space between Us* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), pp. 153-154.]

A Blessing by John O'Donohue

As you enter this place, may all the weight of the world fall from your shoulders.
May your heart be tranquil here, blessed by peace the world cannot give.
May nothing destructive enter here.
May this be a safe place, full of understanding and acceptance,
 where you can be as you are,
 without the need of any mask of pretense or image.
May this place be a home of discovery for you, where possibilities that sleep in your soul
 can emerge to deepen and refine your vision for all that is yet to come to birth.
May this space and time be for you a house of courage,
 where healing and growth are loved,
 where dignity and forgiveness prevail;
 a home where patience of spirit is prized,
 and the sight of the destination is never lost
 though the journey be difficult and slow.
May you find delight in this space and time.
May it be a place of welcome for those who are broken and diminished.
May you have the eyes to see
 that no visitor arrives without a gift
 and no guest leaves without a blessing.

[adapted from John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space between Us* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), pp. 19-20.]

A Blessing by John O'Donohue

May morning be astir with the harvest of night;
Your mind quickening to the eros of a new question,
Your eyes seduced by some unintended glimpse
That cut right through the surface to a source.

May this be a morning of innocent beginning,
When the gift within you slips clear
Of the sticky web of the personal
With its hurt and its hauntings,
And fixed fortress corners.

A morning when you become a pure vessel
For what wants to ascend from silence,

May your imagination knows
The grace of perfect danger,

To reach beyond limitation,
And the wheel of repetition,

Deep into the call of all
The unfinished and unsolved

Until the veil of the unknown yields
And something original begins
To stir toward your senses
And grow stronger in your heart
In order to come to birth
In a clean line of form,
That claims from time
A rhythm not yet heard,
That calls space to
A different shape.

[John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space between Us* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), pp. 17-18.]

The Fusion (Anthony de Mello)

You descend to the depths of your being
to find a mantra there, a word
recited to the rhythm of your heartbeats.
It is the expression of your longing and your love.

At first you hear it dimly,
but it gradually grows louder.

Now listen to the word
resounding in the whole of you . . .
your heart, your head,
your limbs, your stomach.

Do not pronounce the word.
Only listen,
rejoicing in the thought
that while it resounds in you
it makes you whole.

Now see it break through
the barriers of your being
and invade the world around you
– the earth and sky
and all the universe.

You are the center from which it ripples out
to the frontiers of the world.

See every creature throb
to the rhythm of your heartbeat
and of your hidden word.
Plants and birds and stones
and trees and stars and sun
resound with the word
and by it are made whole.

Now melt into the word,
becoming one with it,
and shout it out interiorly
with all your strength.

[Anthony de Mello, *Wellsprings* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1985), pp. 185-186.]

