

“Being Still”

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This will be the third week now we have heard “Love your neighbor as yourself”, and I decided to follow the revised common lectionary and use it one more time, and work to offer one more perspective. It says love your neighbor *as yourself*. But isn't that something that so many of us struggle with? Loving ourselves? Perhaps first we need to practice a little self-care, and then we can work on letting that love bubble over and extending it to others.

Will you pray with me? May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Here's the big reveal: I have just finished listening to the most wonderful audiobook called **Wild and Precious**: A celebration of Mary Oliver. I do not have time to tell you how much and all the different parts I loved about this book. I will just have to settle with encouraging you to go listen to it yourselves - and listen you must, as it is only available as an audiobook. Many of you are likely already familiar with Mary Oliver's poems, and I have read you several already this morning, but what I have learned through listening to this book is that for Mary Oliver, seeing the world through wonderment was absolutely a learned skill for her. Coming from a very traumatic childhood, she made a conscious choice to view the world in this way. One of my favorite lines, from a poem titled “It Was Early” tucked

amongst the lines describing one of her early morning walks and the nature she was observing, she writes “Sometimes I only need to stand wherever I am to be blessed”.

Look around you. Like - actually - right now. Take a deep breath, lift your head, and look all around you.

How blessed are we to be safe and warm within these walls, within this community.

How blessed are we that this space encourages us to be ourselves and to come as we are.

How blessed are we to look out these windows to see trees, and grass, and mountains, and to breathe fresh air.

There are little blessings everywhere if you just take the time to stop and look.

I will be the first to tell you that I am not good at not worrying. I worry about lots of things. Mom things: like, did the laundry get turned over? Did the dogs eat? Where is your soccer uniform, your cleats? Do you have your shinguards? Did you do your homework? Did that permission slip get signed? What is that rash on your arm, did you brush your teeth?

Work things: Did I post that schedule? Who Am I going to find to cover that shift? The ham didn't come in again?

All of these things are fairly practical things. Things I actually am sort of ... required?... to worry about. It comes with the job description. But those bigger, more open ended, more worldly, human being- focused worries? What can we do with those? Worries that, for me, are compounding with this upcoming election. Worries that made me feel physically ill after

reading about last Sunday's rally at Madison Square Garden. Worries that my body, my very soul just can't hold inside for much longer. Worries that I am struggling with because I feel like there is nothing I can do now, today, mere hours from this very important election.

We have written the postcards, talked to our community, our neighbors, made donations, and I will (and I urge all of you to as well) absolutely be voting (because we can!), but in the end, I, individually, have very little control over this outcome.

And there isn't much that is more terrifying than having zero control. For all of us, kids and adults alike.

The kids in this room spent several of the formative years of their young lives isolated in their houses, schooling in front of a computer screen, afraid of being physically near their neighbors, friends, and grandparents as a result of a deadly pandemic. This culture of fear did not stop there. Our world is violent and mean in ways that have become difficult to shield our children from. Drills in schools are not a new thing - and preparedness for the worst is not a bad thing - but it's the fact that the worst is happening more regularly that is hard to handle. Our world, this country, is deeply divided, filled with hate, and increasingly terrifying. It is hard not to worry.

I came across a well-timed meme the other day that said "God said Be Still and Know, not freak out and question everything".

I mean, obviously, the household things need to be tended to, and the work things, I could try to just be still, but that's not really what they are paying

me to do. But phew... be still. Those things that we cannot control. Maybe stop freaking out about those? More and more lately I wake up tired. And not from not closing my eyes for the right number of hours. The kind of tired that is persistent and nagging because I am not at peace. The kind of tired that comes from worrying too much. From not being still. From freaking out questioning everything about things I really can't change.

A large part of "**Wild and Precious**" are the interviews with people who knew Mary Oliver. There are many amazing messages from these folks, and from hearing Mary herself read her own words. Messages of hope and beauty. The overwhelming message though, is to pay attention to your life - don't be just a visitor here. Really LIVE. Perhaps the most famous quote from any Mary Oliver poem is "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life".

"The divine is all around us." Says Sophia Bush, the narrator of "**Wild and Precious**". "We can smell it, see it, touch it, hear it. All we have to do is pay attention. But how hard that can be, especially when you're busy, worried, distracted, stressed.... Because paying attention takes work." Another contributor, Cathleen Falsani, is an award winning journalist who has written about the intersection of religion/faith/beliefs/spirituality and culture for more than two decades. She says "Prayer used to be something I would do intentionally.....my understanding of prayer now is that prayer is kind of everything. It is how I move through the world. It has become listening a lot more than talking. And literally moving in the world. So walking is a prayer, feeding my dog is a prayer, making dinner for myself

and my family is prayer. Dusting the pictures in the living room is a prayer. It's not one thing, it's every thing...Our very being-ness is a prayer.”

So that's what I'm asking you today. Do every thing. Together let's use our very being-ness to pray instead of worry. Pray with your feet. Pray with your hands. Pray with your breath.

Here's the thing though - even through prayer, God isn't going to remove the problem. It isn't going to magically go away, but if you work to trust and have faith, God will show you a path through it. If you pray for a way through, if you ask for it, and then you are still and you trust in God, God will show you a way. But you have to be still enough, wise enough to see it, to take it.

Regardless of what happens this week, we must take it upon ourselves to build trust with one another, to build faith, to trust in God - or whatever higher power you may believe in. We must go out into this beautiful world we live in and notice the little blessings everywhere. Take the time to stop and see. We must walk the path through this challenging time with courage, sprinkling seeds of kindness and grace along the way and sharing our faith with others. We may not be able to effect major change in this country immediately. But we can effect change. We can model how to treat people, all people, like people. We can share how our faith is guiding us to act, we can encourage others to lean into a faith of their own. We can help those who need it without judgement. And we can be still and listen. Because perhaps part of God's answer to a way through difficult times is to get out

and intentionally seek beauty and see, hear, touch, smell the world through a lens of wonderment.

And perhaps, there will be moments when you just don't know how to do it. You don't know what is happening. You don't know how to process it. You don't know what to do with your emotions. You don't know how to handle a situation. And that's ok. Because God knows. You can sit at the feet of God with whatever grain of faith you have left in that moment and say "God! I just don't know! But you do". And just leave it there. Say Amen.

God hears our prayers. God hears our very being-ness. God hears us.

"Be still, and know that I am God."