

Maundy Thursday
March 28 2013
Prose and Poetry
St. Augustine's, Freeland

This evening, I have some readings, some words to offer you, some in the form of prose, some in the form of poetry. Very few of these words are mine. Most come from others, people I will credit. I give you these words as you and I travel through Holy Week, stopping here on Maundy Thursday for a little while, perhaps to have our feet washed, perhaps to be fed in small measure. Whatever the logic, here we are.

Use the small silences between readings as you wish.

Blessed be the Name of God

First: [A Maundy Thursday Story] William Seth Adams

It was a special evening. Towels were placed on the benches that sat either side of the altar platform. On the floor were several basins with pitchers of water next to them. Any who wished to receive the ministrations of foot washing were invited to come forward. They were invited first to have their own feet washed and then, if so moved, to share in the washing. The pastor waited and greeted warmly those who came forward. She began the washing.

In the gathering that evening was a man whose body, as a child, had been abused in ways he was only beginning to be able to admit and explore. Stewart, now in his early 30's, was still very reluctant to be touched, except in the safety of the ceremonies at Church. It was his only safe physical environment. He was 'always' at Church, though the ceremonies of this evening, this Maundy Thursday evening, were likely not going to draw him in.

He watched people go forward and have their feet washed, and he watched many wash the feet of others. He just watched. Then, for reason he could not have spoken, and virtually involuntarily, his 'body' got him up and he went forward. A man he had seen before in the congregation but did not know met him, helped him find a place and

began to wash his feet. He touched Stewart's feet in a gentle and efficient sort of way, pouring warm water on them and rubbing them with his hands. What he did was not intended to wash his feet so as to make them physically clean. Rather, what he did was to 'wash' them so as to care for them. Stewart cried very quietly, very quietly, indeed.

When the man finished his ministrations, he dried Stewart's feet with a fresh towel and Stewart joined the 'washers,' as if a very natural matter. He never spoke about the experience to the pastor but he knew, from that evening on, that something about his body had been given back.

From "Honoring the Body," 2000, unpublished.

Second: "Coming to God: First Days" Mary Oliver

Lord, what shall I do that I
Can't quiet myself?
Here is the bread, and
Here is the cup, and
I can't quiet myself.

To enter the language of transformation!
To learn the importance of stillness,
 With one's hands folded!

When will my eyes of rejoicing turn peaceful?
When will my joyful feet grow still?
When will my heart stop its prancing
 As over the summer grass?

Lord, I would run for you, loving the miles for your sake.
I would climb the highest tree
To be that much closer.

Lord, I will learn also to kneel down
Into the world of the invisible,
 The inscrutable and the everlasting.
Then I will move no more than the leaves of a tree
 On a day of no wind,

Bathed in light,
Like the wanderer who has come home at last
And kneels in peace, done with all unnecessary things;
Every motion; even words.

Thirst: Poems by Mary Oliver 2006.

Third: "Praying" Mary Oliver

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.

Thirst: Poems by Mary Oliver 2006.

Fourth: "The Other" R.S. Thomas

There are nights that are so still
That I can hear the small owl calling
Miles away. It is then that I lie
In the lean hours awake listening
To the swell born somewhere in the Atlantic
Rising and falling, rising and falling
Wave on wave on the long shore
By the village, that is without light
And companionless.

And the thought comes
Of that other being who is awake, too,

Letting our prayers break on him,
Not like this for a few hours,
But for days, years, for eternity.

R.S. Thomas: Poems, selected by Anthony Thwaite, 1996.

Fifth: "No Title Required" Wislawa Szymborska

It's all come down to me sitting under a tree
On a river bank
On a sunny morning.
It's an inconsequential event
That won't go down in history.
This is not a battle or a pact,
Whose motives are examined,
Or the notable assassination of a tyrant.

Yet I am sitting by the river; that's a fact.
And since I'm here,
I must have come from somewhere,
And before that
I must have turned up in many other places,
Just like the conquerors of lands
Before they set sail.

A moment, however fleeting, has a flamboyant past;
It's Friday before it's Saturday
It's May before it's June.
Its horizons are as real
As those in the fieldglass of a commander.

This tree is a poplar, rooted here for years,
This river is the Raba, which didn't spring up yesterday.
The trail through the bushes
Wasn't blazed the day before.
To disperse the clouds,
The wind must have blown them in earlier.

And though nothing special is happening nearby,

That doesn't mean the world is lacking for detail.
It's not less justified, nor more weakly defined,
Than when the peopling of the continents held it captive.

It's not just conspiracies that are accompanied by silence;
Not just coronations that have their processions of reasons.
The years of revolutionary anniversaries are rounded off
Like stones on the beach.

Dense and intricate is the embroidery of circumstance.
An ant's stitch in the grass.
Grass sewn into the earth.
The pattern of a wave through which a stick threads its way.

It turns out that I am, and am looking.
Above me a white butterfly flits about in the air,
His wings belonging only to him,
And through my hands, a shadow flies,
None other, no one else's, than his own.

Facing such a view always leaves me uncertain
That the important
Is more important than the unimportant.

The Selected Poems of Wislawa Szymborska, Translated by Joanna
Trzeciak 2001.

Sixth: "From Blossoms" Li-Young Lee

From blossoms comes
This brown paper bag of peaches
We bought from the boy
At the bend in the road where we turned toward
Signs painted Peaches.

From laden boughs, from hands,
From sweet fellowship in the bins,
Comes nectar at the roadside, succulent
Peaches we devour, dusty skin and all,

Comes the familiar dust of summer, dust we eat.

O, to take what we love inside,
To carry within us an orchard, to eat
Not only the skin, but the shade,
Not only the sugar, but the days, to hold
The fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into
The round jubilation of peach.
There are days we live
As if death were nowhere
In the background; from joy
To joy to joy, from wing to wing,
From blossom to blossom to
Impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom.

Published in *Good Poems, Selected and Introduced by Garrison Keillor* 2002.

Seventh: "Meditation in the Spring Rain" Wendell Berry

In the April rain I climbed up to drink
Of the live water leaping off the hill,
White over the rocks. Where the mossy root
Of a sycamore cups the flow, I drank
And saw the branches feathered with green.
The thickets, I said, send up their praise
At dawn. Was that what I meant—I meant
My words to have the heft and grace, the flight
And weight of the very hill, its life
Rising—or was it some old exultation
That abides with me? We'll not soon escape
The faith of our fathers—no more than
Crazy old Mrs. Gaines, whom my grandmother
Remembers standing balanced eighty years ago
Atop a fence in Port Royal, Kentucky,
Singing: "One Lord, one Faith, and one
Cornbread." They had a cage built for her
In a room, "nearly as big as the room, not
Cramped up," and when she grew wild

They kept her there. But mostly she went free
In the town, and they allowed the children
To go for walks with her. She strayed once
Beyond where they thought she went, was lost
To them, "and they had an awful time
Finding her." For her, to be free
Was only to be lost. What it is about her
That draws me on, so that my mind becomes a child
To follow after her? An old woman
When my grandmother was a girl, she must have seen
The virgin forest standing here, the amplitude
Of our beginning, of which no speech
Remains. Out of the town's lost history,
Buried in minds long buried, she has come,
Brought back by a memory near death. I see her
In her dusky clothes, hair uncombed, the children
Following. I see her wandering, muttering
To herself as her way was, among those hills
Half a century before my birth, in the silence
Of such speech as I know. Dawn and twilight
And dawn again trembling in the leaves
Over her, tramped the reveling verges
Of her time. It was a shadowy country
That she knew, holding a darkness that was past
And a darkness that was to come. The fleeting lights
Tattered her churchly speech to mad song.
When her poor wandering head broke the confines
Of all any of them knew, they put her in a cage.
But I am glad to know it was a commodious cage,
Not cramped up. And I am glad to know
That other times the town left her free
To be as she was in it, and to go her way.
May it abide a poet with as much grace!
For I too am perhaps a little mad,
Standing here wet in the drizzle, listening
To the clashing syllables of the water. Surely
There is a great Word being put together here.
I began to hear it gather in the opening
Of the flowers and the leafing-out of the trees,
In the growth of bird nests in the crotches

Of the branches, in the settling of the dead
Leaves into the ground, in the whittling
Of beetle and grub, in my thoughts
Moving in the hill's flesh. Coming here,
I crossed a place where a stream flows
Underground, and the sounds of the hidden water
And the water come to light braided in my ear.
I think the maker is here, creating his hill
As it will be, out of what it was.
The thickets, I say, send up their praise
At dawn! One Lord, one Faith, and one Cornbread
Forever! But hush, Wait. Be as still
As the dead the unborn in whose silence
That old one walked, muttering and singing,
Followed by the children.

For a time there
I turned away from the words I knew, and was lost.
For a time I was lost and free, speechless,
In the multitudinous assembling of his Word.

Collected Poems 1957-1982, Tenth Printing, 1998

Next to Last: [Approaching Easter] Vigen Guroian

Several summers ago my children found two turtles and put them in the vegetable garden. During a thaw the next February, as I was digging up the soggy soil where the peas go, I lifted a heavy mound with my shovel, and then another. The two turtles had burrowed down for winter sleep, and I had rudely awakened them too soon. So I carried them to a corner of the garden where I would not disturb them and dug them in again. When my wife said that she feared the turtles might be dead, I said I did not think so [though I wasn't as sure as I sounded.] I insisted that in spring they would come up. And they did in Easter week.

Lilies and hyacinths signify the resurrection, and I can understand why. But I have a pair of turtles that plant themselves in my garden each fall like two gigantic seeds and rise on Easter with earthen crowns

upon their humbled heads. With the women at the tomb, I marvel. For
“Christ did arise, Christ did awaken/Out of the virgin tomb, out of the
tomb of light” [Armenian Ode for Ordinary Sundays].

And he leads us back, back into the garden of delight.

Inheriting Paradise: Meditations on Gardening 1999. Page 30.

Last: “Maundy Thursday” Sarah Rossiter

Kneeling on Boston Common it’s the foot
Naked, resting in my lap with clean towel,
Socks, warm water waiting, that tells me
This is what happens after a cold winter
Of deep snow when you’re homeless in
Dirty socks and cracked shoes that don’t fit:
This foot, bloody, swollen, toes deformed,
I wash gently, first one, then the other, and
Never have I felt so close to Jesus, his feet,
Bare, pierced, bloodied, nailed to the wooden
Cross.

The Christian Century, April 8 2011.

Blessed be the Name of God