

## Sermon September 3, 2023

### Patience - Mary Oliver

What is the good life now? Why,  
look here, consider  
the moon's white crescent  
rounding, slowly, over  
the half month to still another  
perfect circle—  
the shining eye  
that lightens the hills,  
that lays down the shadows  
of the branches of the trees,  
that summons the flowers  
to open their sleepy faces and look up  
into the heavens.  
I used to hurry everywhere,  
and leaped over the running creeks.  
There wasn't  
time enough for all the wonderful things  
I could think of to do  
in a single day. Patience  
comes to the bones  
before it takes root in the heart  
as another good idea.  
I say this  
as I stand in the woods  
and study the patterns  
of the moon shadows,  
or stroll down into the waters  
that now, late summer, have also  
caught the fever, and hardly move  
from one eternity to another.

### Matthew 16:21-28 (NRSV)

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

'For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

### **The Calling Voice of God**

No one can be face-to-face with God and not be changed. Moses was taking care of his father-in-law's flock and minding his own business, when God burst forth in a burning bush. "I Am Who I Am!" God proclaims, and Moses' path of freedom and justice is emblazoned. The burning bush was a pretty clear sign.

Sometimes God comes with flair and drama. Burning bushes and parting seas. Blinding lights on the road and transfiguration on a mountaintop. Sometimes God's presence is made known in more quiet ways – a quiet whisper in your ear, a butterfly.

No matter what the experience – these are things that show us that God is here and God is more powerful than any of the things we fear here on earth.

But the experiences don't last. We are human and we forget. God is with Moses until the end of his life, but the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land is a difficult one... because the people forget what God has done for them... Sometimes almost as soon as God has accomplished the impossible. Centuries later, the Apostle Paul sat in a prison cell, unsure if he would ever see the light of day, and wrote a letter to the Philippian community that he had founded:

***All I want is to know Christ and to experience  
the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings  
and become like him in his death,***

I want to know God, Paul says. I want to know Christ... because knowing is very different from believing. I expect most of us can't remember a time when we didn't believe in God. Raised with the stories of our faith... many of you raised in Trinity or a church very much like it... belief becomes a part of who we are. We can tell about God's great creative acts and the redemptive grace found through a man nailed to a cross... not just any man,

of course... Jesus the Christ, son of God and our savior. We can tell the story because we have heard it so many times before. But does that mean to really... "know" God?

Paul was face to face with the Risen Christ – blinded by him... but he still doesn't *know* him. Last week, we heard Jesus' close friend Peter finally proclaim that Jesus is Christ... But does he really *know* him?

After Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus begins to teach them about Christ crucified... telling them what it would take for the world to be saved. He revealed what would result in the events of Holy Week – his trial and death, before rising again. **And, he says, you need to be willing to do the same thing as Jesus – to pick up your own cross and follow Jesus.**

"Stop it!" Peter cries out, proving that he really didn't get it. Peter didn't like what he heard because it didn't fit his view of how God would save the world. Peter wanted to hear good news – news that made life easier and happier. Peter did not want to hear the real GOOD NEWS found in the Gospel of Christ Crucified.

Jesus knew he had to stop everyone from putting these false expectations on him. "*No you stop it,*" he says. Stop looking at this through the lens of human history and look at what is happening through God's eyes.

Peter cannot begin to understand who Jesus is until he sees it with his own eyes... it's beyond his imagination. We know the story because we've heard it so many times before. This is all new to Peter! He is a witness: to the horror of the Cross, to the one who forgives his killers, to the beauty of the light shining out of the Empty Tomb. Peter comes face-to-face with the God who called him there and empowered him to love with God's unlimited love. We are not witnesses, but we pass on the memories of those who were there when they crucified our Lord. When we say that Jesus is our Christ, we are saying we are willing to follow him no matter where he leads us. Jesus reminds us today that to follow Jesus is to deny ourselves... to be willing to look beyond our personal hopes and dreams and look at the world the way God does. Jesus tells that we need to be willing to drag the cross with us, no matter how difficult or dangerous it may be. To put aside ourselves and our needs for the sake of our neighbors.

When we say we want to know God, this is the God we meet.

And the God we meet – "I am who I am" – is found in the calling voice of Jesus Christ.

We are called to follow Jesus wherever he leads us, even if it doesn't make sense, dragging our cross along the way. We are expected to choose Jesus over everything else – even when the choice makes us uncomfortable. And what are we called to do?

- To love our neighbors, and welcome them into our communities, even when they are different from us. Even when we really don't like them very much.
- To forgive those who hurt us and to forgive those hurt the people that we love most.
- To live lives of faithful action: as the prophet Micah reminds us:

God requires that we stand up for justice, show mercy and to live our faith walking humbly with God... Always!

We meet God in Jesus ... we get glimpses of God's transformative presence... in how we treat each other, how we live out our faith.

Right now... God is reshaping and restructuring our lives in amazing ways so that we can be the ones that reshape and restructure the world around God's love.

Paul said "I want to know Christ!" It is here that we will get to know the Christ. We, my beloved, are the Body of Christ. The hands and feet, heart and soul of Christ. We know Christ when we know one another.

It is up to us - people of faith – the Body of Christ - to enable the world to see and understand the value of every human being.... A world where no one is left behind. Our God loves, honors, values, and celebrates all of humanity, including people pushed to the margins. That's what Jesus' ministry was all about and that should be the foundation of our faith too.

Our God loves, honors, values, and celebrates us—all of this messy, creative, flawed humanity. Our calling is to help the world see the value in every human being and to strive for peace and justice for every human being around the globe.

That is what it means to follow Christ.

And we do not do this alone! We are blessed to drag our crosses in the company of a faithful band of followers of Jesus. We may never encounter a burning bush or a blinding light, but we know that we are not alone in our journey. We have one another. Whenever we look into the eyes of our beloved siblings, we get a sacred glimpse of Christ dwelling there.