

Poem for Friday Feb. 26: "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (third verse), by James Weldon Johnson

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path we pray,

Lest our feet stray from the places, Our God, where we met Thee;
Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God
True to our native land.

Though not African American I myself have long been fed and inspired by African American spirituality. The above, originally written as a poem, became known as the African American National Anthem. To my mind it conveys that faith and spirituality powerfully. I hope that many of you saw, as I did, the recent public television documentary, THE BLACK CHURCH, which underscores the centrality of faith for the black community and the black freedom struggle. That same God of weary years and silent tears has brought us far and led us into light.

Collins Kilburn

Lent I, Saturday, February 27, 2021

This Saturday, let's read Wallace Stevens' poem, *The Snow Man*. Note: "Snow Man" is not the sort of "snowman" you'll find in a fairy tale or cartoon. Another thing to start with: I think when reading the poem for the first time, it will be useful to skip any sticky idea, to just pick up a few favorite words, grab a few images, like evergreens or snow or ice or wind, and go.

The Snow Man

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;
And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter
Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,
Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place
For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

— Wallace Stevens

Okay, let's reread the poem, this time aloud, or click [here](#), wait a few seconds, and Alan Davis Drake will read it to you. The entire poem is a single sentence, pieces linked together with "and" after "and." Keep that structural connection in mind. Getting back to the words, the snow man has a "mind of winter." Literally; no metaphor. Without winter mind he couldn't narrate the poem. With it, he can "regard" and "behold" evergreens frosted, crusted, shagged by snow and ice, even glittering in the January sun. Not only does the snow man have a mind of winter, he has "been cold a long time"; he doesn't even "think of any misery in the sound of the wind." The sound of the wind becomes the same wind "blowing in the same bare

place.” The snow man observes all of it without emotion; no strings attached. The poem doesn’t point toward anything outside of itself.

Now, up steps “the listener.” It turns out that everything in the poem thus far, all the connections, are for the listener, who listens “in the snow”; who, “nothing himself,” beholds nothing — “nothing that is not there, and the nothing that is.” Snow Man/narrator, and Listener/reader, are united in nothing, no need for language, end of poem.

Of course, the poem is not in these notes, but I hope they will help you it read once more.

From Tom Fewel.

Poem for Sunday, Feb. 28

I (Meredith) first met this poem when on a search for a poem to be read at my mother's memorial service, in September 2013, at Binkley Church. It spoke to me of a love in her of trees, and also of her deep desire to grow, to become better as a person. Don't we all?

When I Am Among the Trees, by Mary Oliver

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."

Poem for Monday March 1, from Sharon Blessum

You may recall last week's *Come-to-Jesus Meeting* was about the need to recognize our need for a Higher Power. Our ongoing contemplative experience of the 12 steps is further enhanced by realizing our place in the scheme of things, such as in this poem based on Psalm 8.

*O Beloved,
how noble Your Names in all the earth;
chanted by infants and elders,
a sound to still all violent vibrations.
When I look at the heavens,
the moon and the stars
You flung into being,
who are we I wonder,
less than Thee
yet not,
made from the same Energy
as galaxies and ground,
a little lower than the angels,
asked to walk gently
with All Our Relations.*

Sharon Blessum, *Songs of the Beloved*

Poem for Tuesday March 2

At 83+ I often think of my mortality, especially as my body keeps adding to my list of the ailments of age. This has been especially poignant throughout the past year of living with anxiety about getting Covid. But, I was well protected and cared for and here I am alive and Covid-free with more opportunities to enjoy the life I've been given. This poem always speaks to me, saying: live your passion, make each day count, make the world a better place. Marge Miles

When Death Comes

When death comes
like the hungry bear in autumn
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse

to buy me, and snaps his purse shut;
when death comes
like the measles-pox;

when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,

I want to [step](#) through the door full of curiosity, wondering;
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?

And therefore I look upon everything
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,
and I consider eternity as another possibility,

and I think of each life as a flower, as common
as a field daisy, and as singular,

and each name a comfortable music in the mouth
tending as all music does, toward silence,

and each body a lion of courage, and something
precious to the earth.

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was a bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

-- Mary Oliver

Poem for Wednesday, March 3

I (Adams Wofford) like this poem because of the spirit of ageless competence that it conveys.

I knew the names of all the cows before
I knew my alphabet, but no matter the
subject, I had mastery of it, and when
it came time to help in the fields, I
learned to drive a tractor at just the right
speed, so that two men, walking
on either side of the moving wagon
could each lift a bale, walk towards
the steadily arriving platform and
simultaneously hoist the hay onto
the rack, walk to the next bale, lift,
turn, and find me there, exactly where
I should be, my hand on the throttle,
carefully measuring out the pace.

-- Joyce Sutphen

For Thursday, March 4

I (Stephanie Ford) resonate with Mary Oliver in this poem, as I often awake early to read and pray, and I love the moment when the birds greet the first signs of morning light. Although this poem seems to evoke a lake in summer – it holds something universal for a winter morn.

The Loon

Not quite four a.m., when the rapture of being alive strikes me from sleep, and I rise from the comfortable bed and go to another room, where my books are lined up in their neat and colorful rows. How

magical they are! I choose one and open it. Soon I have wandered in over the waves of the words to the temple of thought.

And then I hear outside, over the actual waves, the small, perfect voice of the loon. He is also awake, and with his heavy head uplifted he calls out to the fading moon, to the pink flush swelling in the east that, soon, will become the long, reasonable day.

Inside the house it is still dark, except for the pool of lamplight in which I am sitting.

I do not close the book.

Neither, for a long while, do I read on.

~Mary Oliver