

## Reconnecting with the Light

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### Food for Thought

The Turtle (abridged)

Mary Oliver

The turtle

breaks from the blue-black skin of the water ...

to dig with her ungainly feet a nest ...

and you think of her patience, her fortitude,

her determination to complete what she was born to do –

and then you realize a greater thing –

she doesn't consider what she was born to do.

She's only filled with an old blind wish.

It isn't even hers but came to her in the rain or the soft wind,  
which is a gate through which her life keeps walking.

She can't see herself apart from the rest of the world

or the world from what she must do every spring.

Crawling up the high hill,

luminous under the sand that has packed against her skin,

she doesn't dream

she knows

she is a part of the pond she lives in

the tall trees are her children,

the birds that swim above her

are tied to her by an unbreakable string.

Scripture:

Matthew 4:12-23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned.” From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

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In the Celtic world the gateway [of heaven] is present everywhere. In every place is the immediacy of heaven. In every moment we can glimpse the Light that was in the beginning and from which all things have come. (John Philip Newell)

In the chapter entitled “Reconnecting with the Light” from *The Rebirthing of God*, John Philip Newell sees the poet Mary Oliver as one of the great Prophets of Light in our modern world. She speaks of “the light at the center of every cell.” It is the essence of life, the center from which all things have their being.

New science views it as the light that burst the universe into being at the beginning of time, and that still pulsates at the heart of everything that has been created. (JPN)

Not only is this new science, it is also old-time religion. John Philip Newell in his presentation of Celtic Spirituality goes all the way back to John Scotus Eriugena from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, who said that the Light of God is the “Essence of all things.” Everything originates in the Light of God. God is the Light that flows through all things. If we take the time, like mystics and poets, we may be able to see this light and to be “astonished.” (See the line from Mary Oliver’s “The Messenger” below.)

It doesn’t have to be the blue iris, it could be the 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. (Mary Oliver)

And you may hear it say “Come, follow me,” as Jesus said to the fishermen as he began his ministry by inviting companions to join him on the way.

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### **An outline of readings that I used as guideposts for what I shared**

*Line from “The Messenger” by Mary Oliver:*

My work is loving the world ... which is mostly to be astonished.

By seeing every little thing as a message, every little thing becomes a gateway to heaven for Mary Oliver. Heaven and the Holy are not far away from us, they are all around us. This “seeing” is the first step along the way of compassion that we discussed last week. Compassion as the courage to see, feel, act. This “seeing” does not set one nation, one religion, one race, one class, one sexuality, one gender above others, but sees the unity within the diversity of all our relations, and so is not afraid of differences.

*Lines from “The Turtle” by Mary Oliver:*

The turtle, “filled with an old blind wish,” knows what she has to do ... which is a gate through which her life keeps walking. [We could call this “the thin place.”] ... she is a part of the pond that she lives in.

This “knowing what to do” is reminiscent of what John Philip Newell said in his Friday evening lecture at San Anselmo Presbyterian Church. All creation has within it a Holy Longing for union. It is a gravitational force.

*The Gospel – Jesus calling the disciples:*

After John was arrested, Jesus withdraws to Galilee. He withdraws to a land that the prophet Isaiah said was a place where “people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.” Jesus takes up the call for repentance people heard from John the Baptist, but with a new meaning: now the Kingdom of Heaven is inaugurated, not merely announced. It is in the way we treat each other now. Jesus isn’t hanging out in Galilee. He’s heading for Jerusalem. He’s heading for Washington DC.

But first Jesus draws around him companions for the journey. The Beloved Community is not created by a soloist. Jesus begins with people who know how to mend the net so that it holds the catch. Jesus begins with people who know how to cast into the unknown, trusting and hoping that there is nourishment there. Mend nets and bring people in. Mend relationships and bring people together. These fisherman followed Jesus because they felt a longing within themselves to do “what they were born to do.”

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Thousands of women (and men and children) felt within themselves a call to do “what they were born to do” as they joined the women’s marches all around the world, proclaiming the inalienable rights of all people, all creation. One woman, Teresa Shook, began those marches by inviting forty friends to follow her to Washington D.C. to protect the rights of women, men, children and the earth. She said, “Come, follow me.” Many hundreds of thousands of her closest friends showed up. They knew what they had to do: Love the pond that we are born in, and do something astonishing.