

“Exercise, Sleep and Fishing”

Rev. Bill Eichhorn

May 12, 2019



First reading

Matthew 6:25-29 New Revised Standard Version

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

Second reading

from *Upstream* by Mary Oliver

I quickly found for myself two blessings: the natural world, and the world of writing, literature. These were the gates through which I vanished from a difficult place And this is what I learned: that the world's otherness is antidote to confusion, that standing within this otherness—the beauty and the mystery of the world, out in the fields or deep inside books—can re-dignify the worst-stung heart.

In an interview, Rachel Maddow, the MSNBC political commentator, was asked how she coped with the cyclical depression she has had since puberty. She replied:

It doesn't take away from my joy or my work or my energy, but coping with depression is something that is part of the everyday way that I live and have lived for as long as I can remember.... There are three things I do to stay sane: I exercise, I sleep – I'm a good sleeper – and I fish.

Like Rachel, most of us have found things that help us cope with the craziness of the world we live in. If you are like me, some of those things were fashioned in our childhood or teen years, as we felt overwhelmed by dysfunctional family dynamics or confounded at trying to navigate the troubled waters of puberty. The second reading this morning, tells how Mary Oliver discovered early in her life how to keep herself sane:

I quickly found for myself two blessings: the natural world, and the world of writing, literature. These were the gates through which I vanished from a difficult place.... And this is what I learned: **that the world's otherness is antidote to confusion**, that standing *within* this otherness—the beauty and the mystery of the world, out in the fields or deep inside books—can re-dignify the worst-stung heart.

In a time when catastrophic climate change threatens life on this incredible planet and a deepening constitutional crisis threatens our fundamental democratic institutions and values, what do you do to keep yourself sane? What is your antidote for when your heart is stung by fear, by grief? Like Rachel and Mary, many of us would list exercise, sleep, reading, experiencing the beauty and mystery of the natural world. While a few of us might list fishing, more of us, I think, would say we turn to things like gardening, hiking, friends and family, travel, rooting for the Warriors or the Giants or the A's, listening to music, practicing yoga, and appreciating art (which is, by the way, just another good reason to come to CCC so we can be inspired by the paintings of local artists like Mary Vezie). As a spiritual community, CCC is an antidote for these disturbing times and for the personal challenges we face. By being a caring community that uses contemplative practices to ground our lives in a sacred "otherness," we are an immunization against the crazy confusion out there. We are a people that knows it is better to watch the birds of the air and admire the lilies and the lupine, than to dwell on our fears.

Coming back to Mary Oliver, in her book of essays, *Upstream*, she writes in a chapter called "Staying Alive":

So, it comes first, the world. Then, literature. And then, what one pencil moving over a thousand miles of paper can (perhaps, sometimes) do.

For me, one of the most potent antidotes to the noise and confusion of these times and to the challenges that come with aging is writing poetry. Sometimes it does feel like my pen moves over miles and miles of paper before a poem arrives, which simply means my noticing of the natural world, as well as my inner world, has not been intense enough—that my watching for the extraordinary in daily life has not been sharp enough. Each of the following four poems arrived as an antidote, whether I knew it at the time or not. Perhaps something in them will feed your resilience.

Imprint

Bill Eichhorn

Here, at dusk

white foam rides high
on inky rollers rumbling
toward the beach

and

molten light
illuminates wet sand—
a monk's manuscript.

Here

where the sea presses
driftwood into pulp —
I take up the pen

Just Looking

Bill Eichhorn

Just looking into
 a glorious
 spring morning
garden sparkled
 with dew
 the air
cleansed
 by a silent
 ocean breeze
that invites
 a quiet moment
 to wait for,
to welcome
 whatever comes,
 and if nothing
that's okay
 because
 it's the looking
that matters –
 three deer
 tip toe down the street

Bonsai Garden

Bill Eichhorn

Facing East,
 the bonsai assume
 a welcoming pose,
inviting
 a deep breath,
 the quiet.

A Promise

Bill Eichhorn

Holding hands,
 we vowed
 in sickness and in health—

with no idea
 what
 would be required.

Fifty-nine years later,
 cancer taught us again
 what would be called for.

Christmas Eve

Bill Eichhorn

Sitting together in the darkness
at the back of the church, they hold hands and
take comfort from the flickering illumination
of red Advent candles, traditional carols
and a community of friends.

Weakened by chemo for a third round
of breast cancer, she willed herself to be there.
Elegant in gray tunic and slacks with purple head scarf,
she squeezes his hand as the choir sings
O Holy Night and he remembers—

he remembers another Christmas Eve long ago
in another church, where they sat in the balcony
holding hands, eager for the service to end,
so they could disappear into the magic
of a fresh snowfall.

He remembers the ringing
of great bells muffled by snow,
as they embraced, kissed. Such happiness then.
Such happiness tonight for another Christmas Eve.

Winter's Promise

Marty Royster

Tender shoots push their way through
cold soil and autumn leaves
seeking the sun's warmth

Lean fish, hungry from a long winter's rest
surface to curiously explore the water's edge

Tiny bees crawl from the warm safety their mother
built for them
where they have waited long months for this day

Weary travelers making the long flight north
grateful for a place to rest
share their songs

Cherry blossoms falling gently
a memory of January snow

Winter's quiet patience fades
Spring returns.