

“For Longing”

September 1, 2019

Elaine Reichert

First Reading

For Longing by John O’Donohue from *To Bless The Space Between Us*

Blessed be the longing that brought you here
And quickens your soul with wonder.
May you have the courage to listen to the voice of desire
That disturbs you when you have settled for something safe.
May you have the wisdom to enter generously into your own unease
To discover the new direction your longing wants you to take.
May the forms of your belonging—in love, creativity, and friendship—
Be equal to the grandeur and the call of your soul.
May the one you long for long for you.
May your dreams gradually reveal the destination of your desire.
May a secret providence guide your thought and nurture your feeling.
May your mind inhabit your life with the sureness
With which your body inhabits the world.
May your heart never be haunted by ghost-structures of old damage.
May you come to accept your longing as divine urgency.
May you know the urgency with which God longs for you.

Second Reading

A Prayer by Joyce Rupp in *May I Walk You Home*

God of far-seeing eyes
you know what is deep within us;
you love us as we are.
Help us to release anything that keeps us
from being free.
May I be a good companion
for the birth of this freedom
by my openness
and my non-judgment.
And God,
teach us the secrets
of your heart,
for they are the truths
of your great kindness
and compassion.

Longing. A strange, old-fashioned word we don't use much in our buy-it-now culture of instant gratification. And yet, in spite of our ready access to entertainment, consumer goods, exotic foods, ready meals, and speedy home delivery, many of us feel a profound emptiness. This emptiness leads to a longing for something deeper, a knowing that somewhere deep within you there is more to life. This longing may or may not have a discernable form. Yet it has power—a profound, spiritual power because it is a cry from your soul.

When I first heard John O'Donohue's poem "For Longing," I was shaken. It reached deep into my heart and articulated my own yearnings. It gave me words as well as a startled joy to realize that someone else understood something I couldn't name on my own. I want to guide you through these powerful words in a meditative way so that they can unlock some of the yearning in your own hearts.

Take a moment to quiet your minds. You can close your eyes if that will help. Allow yourself to take a deep breath and then gently release it. And again, another breath, in and out. And a third as you feel your body relax and your mind settle. *Blessed be the longing that brought you here and quickens your soul with wonder.* Yes, it is longing that draws you to this community, to communal worship in hope that your soul will be touched, stimulated, awakened, nourished. May it be so for you today.

May you have the courage to listen to the voice of desire that disturbs you when you have settled for something safe. Is there anyone who has escaped the trap of settling for something safe when you know something wildly more interesting and challenging is calling you to take a risk? It's never too late to heed this disturbing voice. The poet Robert Frost describes the moment he made his choice at the crossroads between the safe and the call: "I looked down one, as far as I could see, and I, I chose the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." Have you faced such a crossroad in your own life? What did you choose? There are many forks in the road through life, and each one offers a new opportunity to follow your soul's call.

May you have the wisdom to enter generously into your own unease to discover the new direction your longing wants you to take. As a culture, we're very uncomfortable with unease. We want answers, solutions, security. But a time of unease is an important spiritual moment, a time between times, a thin place. It's a time to be patient and gentle with yourself as you carefully examine what isn't working in your life and explore what might change.

May the forms of your belonging—in love, creativity and friendship—be equal to the grandeur and the call of your soul. The grandeur and the call of your soul. The image that comes to me from this verse is the vastness of the star-filled night sky. A glimpse of infinity and infinite possibility. It's hard to find a dark place these days where the night sky isn't blurred by light pollution, and perhaps that's an apt analogy for our own inability to see our own soul's grandeur.

May the one you long for long for you. May your dreams gradually reveal the destination of your desire. May the one you long for long for you. That takes my breath away. How often do we look in vain for that *anam cara*, that soul friend, who feels toward us with the same intensity we yearn to express toward another; that rare friend who can receive all our disparate yearnings with openness and compassion?

I think the key word here is "gradually." Over the years various pop psychology weekends/workshops have pushed people to go home and dump everything about their lives to pursue some radical new direction. That isn't how the soul works. That would be like uprooting a giant oak tree and expecting it to survive being transplanted. The soul is a tender, living energy that will thrive and guide you by your gentle and

patient explorations. John Philip Newell illustrates this when he describes the gradual overlay of Celtic Christianity on traditional beliefs.

There was no desire to change everything or to sweep away all that had gone before it; instead, the gospel was permitted to work its mystery of transformation in the life and culture of the people.

This exemplifies the ongoing call to trust the mystery of transformation to work when you open to the thin place that whispers to your soul.

May a secret providence guide your thought and nurture your feeling. Trust. That secret providence, what some might call God, cares deeply for your wellbeing, for your soul. Sometimes that providence speaks through dreams, sometimes through other people or unexpected encounters. Be ready to notice and receive these gifts.

May your mind inhabit your life with the sureness with which your body inhabits the world. Take a moment to really feel your body in this place, at this moment. Are you comfortable? What hurts? Comfortable or uncomfortable, your body is the vessel by which you move through your earthly life. Your mind is also part of how you live. What's in your mind? Whether it's full of chatter, random thoughts, worries or creative ideas, your mind needs nourishment. What are you feeding your mind? Is it quality food or junk? You can change that.

May your heart never be haunted by the ghost-structures of old damage. If you have ever had your heart broken by life's disappointments, you know how persistent these ghost-structures can be. In the book of Genesis, God gives Adam dominion over the animals by asking him to name them. This is a powerful tool for banishing the ghost-structures of old damage. What you can name, you can conquer. This isn't an easy or comfortable task, yet it's vital if your soul is to soar free. You may find it important to seek spiritual direction or therapy support if your ghosts are too much to banish on your own. Be patient, be gentle. The prayer poem from Joyce Rapp came out of her experience companioning a woman as she was dying. The woman had carried a secret burden for most of her life, and as death approached, she shared it with Joyce. Releasing this virulent ghost-structure gave her the peace of heart to finish her life with confident joy.

May you come to accept your longing as divine urgency. May you know the urgency with which God longs for you. Yes. God is longing for you. No matter what scars you may carry from life's wounds, God sees you as good. You may turn away from God, you may be angry with God for some of life's unfairness, but God continues to see the goodness beneath your pain. This is the light St. John speaks of. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it." Your soul is this light, and the darkness of pain and disappointment cannot overcome it. Newell quotes Eriugena: "What has been lost is the true beholding of the light from the inner eyes." The light is there, always, waiting for you to see it.

There's an old Sufi story about a contest between two spiritual camps to determine who could best depict God. One group was busy trying to build a structure that would portray their idea of God. The other group had a large brass disc that they proceeded to polish. When the people in the first group asked them what they were doing, they said they were creating a vessel that would reflect God's light. You are that vessel. You are the light of the world. You may need polish from time to time, but the light will always shine onto you, into you and through you.

Amen.