



Praying with the Poets

T.S. Eliot * Mary Oliver * Emily Dickinson * Langston Hughes * Tagore
Maya Angelo * Jane Kenyon * Dylan Thomas * Rumi * Wendell Berry
Thomas Traherne * Scott Cairns

Community Christian Church – 4601 Main Street – Kansas City Missouri
Session #8 – Rumi

Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi (September 30, 1207 - December 17, 1273),– born in Balkh in northeastern province of Persia, present day Afghanistan; moved with family to Baghdad, then Mecca, then Damascus, before settling in Konya (formerly Inconium), Anatolia, then part of Seljuk Empire in the northwestern province of Persia, present day Turkey; father serves as respected Islamic theologian, teacher, and preacher; after father's death, Rumi succeeds him at the age of 24; Shamsuddin of Tabriz, a wandering dervish, inspires Rumi to compose poems; leaves behind stunning body of work, quantitatively and qualitatively – in addition to composing 30,000 lyric poems, a lengthy poem about religious mysticism runs 26,000 verses – was the founder of the Mevlevi order of Sufis, better known as the Whirling Dervishes of Sufism, which abides into the 21st century. Championed by contemporary enthusiasts like Fetullah Gulen and translated for a new generation by Coleman Barks, Rumi has become one the most read and beloved poets, especially among those with religious themes, in North America. Legend has it that he did not inscribe any of his poems but rather spoke them as they came to him and his students wrote them down. When he died, his funeral bier was carried throughout Konya with men of five different faiths following it, a testimony to the interfaith attractiveness of his teaching and poetry and his ecumenical spirit.

Day #1: Expectant of the Table of Bounty – In his poem *“What Hidden Sweetness is There,”* Rumi describes a the relation between emptiness and the capacity to be filled by God’s bounty.

*What hidden sweetness there is in this emptiness of the belly!
Man is surely like a lute, no more and no less;
For if, for instance, the belly of the lute becomes full, no
lament high or low will arise from that full lute....
When you keep the fast, good habits gather together before
you like slaves and servants and retinue....
The table arrived from heaven to the tents of the fast, by the
intervention of the prayers of Jesus, son of Mary.
In the fast, be expectant of the table of bounty....*

Pray today for a fasting from that which does not fill or fulfill you , so that you can partake fully of the table of bounty that God will give to you.

Day #2: Through Love – In his poems about human love and his poems about God and the desire for union with God, Rumi’s focus is always on love .

*THROUGH LOVE all that is bitter will be sweet.
Through Love all that is copper will be gold.
Through Love all dregs will turn to purest wine
Through Love all pain will turn to medicine.
Through Love the dead will all become alive.
Through Love the king will turn into a slave!*

Pray this prayer three times today, keenly aware of the gifts love (human and divine) provides for you – sweetness, “golden” character, pure wine, the experience of relief and healing,, a life which is vital and vibrant, truest servanthood and the humbling of the highest.

Day #3: Living, Praying, Being Free – Rumi consistently promoted a profound respect for the fleetingness of life and for the goodness of things as they are, for as long as they are. The following four stanzas can serve as a mantra for living a present-focused day.

*Don't try to hold on to this.
You'll lose it.*

*Don't pull the curtain.
It will end.*

*This moment with all of us here
is paradise,*

*but don't try to leave this way.
You'll ruin it.*

Pray today for a deeper respect for the given-ness of this very day without a need to seal it up for safe-keeping.

Day #4: Searching for the Clear Water – In the poem “A Marriage at Daybreak,” Rumi urges those who are spiritually thirsty to be discerning about what they sip.

*You get restless, you say, when you don't sip
the world's fermentation. But if for one second
you saw the beauty of the clear water of God,
you'd think this other was embalming fluid.*

Pray today that you will be able to see the beauty of the clear water of God and also that you will be able to avoid any “embalming fluid.”

Day #5: Unseen Power – In this couplet, Rumi speaks of the presence of God giving life and vitality to all that human beings do.

*We are the flute, our music is all Thine;
We are the mountains echoing only Thee;*

Give thanks for God's energizing presence in all individual and collective human undertakings.

Day #6: Unadulterated with Fear – We are all of us allured by that which leads to ecstasy. The trick, Rumi would have us know, is which “wine” to drink.

*God has given us a dark wine so potent that,
drinking it, we leave the two worlds....*

*Don't think all ecstasies
are the same!*

*Jesus was lost in his love for God.
His donkey was drunk with barley.*

*Drink from the presence of saints,
not from those other jars....*

*Be a connoisseur,
and taste with caution.*

*Any wine will get you high.
Judge like a king, and choose the purest,*

*the ones unadulterated with fear,
or some urgency about "what's needed."*

....

Pray today that God will guide you in choosing the “wines” that are “unadulterated with fear” and lead you to participate in what is “most needed” in your life, in the life of your community of faith, and in society as a whole.

Day #7: Come, Whoever You Are – In one of the most quoted poems attributed to Rumi, we find the assurance of welcome and hospitality to anyone who

would dare to want to return to God and the embrace of community.

Come, come whoever you are.

Even if you are a wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving.

Ours is not a caravan of despair.

Come even if you have broken your vows a thousand times.

Come, come, come yet again.

Pray today for yourself to “come home” to God's welcome and hospitality, that which we call “Amazing Grace.” Also, pray today for someone you care deeply about that he or she will know God's liberating good news so profoundly and deeply that, like the prodigal son, they will know they can come home to God and the community of faith.

This is a part of the weekly series of the Prayer Group of
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