

**Unitarian Universalist Meeting of South Berkshire**  
February 3, 2019

**Excerpts from worship:**

Welcome to worship this morning. While our services are always intergenerational, on First Sundays, we hold worship that is particularly geared toward intergenerational connection and shared spiritual development, *and* we usually have activities. That will be true today! Later in the service there will be activities for a variety of learning and sharing styles, as we honor Mary Oliver, whose work and life meant so much to so many.

CALL TO WORSHIP “Why I Wake Early” Mary Oliver

Hello, sun in my face.  
Hello, you who make the morning  
and spread it over the fields  
and into the faces of the tulips  
and the nodding morning glories,  
and into the windows of, even, the  
miserable and crotchety—

best preacher that ever was,  
dear star, that just happens  
to be where you are in the universe  
to keep us from ever-darkness,  
to ease us with warm touching,  
to hold us in the great hands of light—  
good morning, good morning, good morning.

Watch, now, how I start the day  
in happiness, in kindness.

MEDITATION, MUSICAL REFLECTION and QUIET  
From Mary Oliver:

We shake with joy, we shake with grief  
What a time they have, these two  
housed as they are in the same body.

HOMILY: “Three Things” Rev. Carol

Mary Oliver died in January at age 83. Oliver had a challenging childhood in Ohio, and never liked being indoors, which she attributes in part to her early experiences. She had a lifelong connection with nature. She believed that poetry should be accessible and that readers should be able to find themselves in a poem. Mary Oliver’s work is in the hymnals and liturgies of Unitarian Universalism, in part because her subjects and style connect her to great Transcendentalists like Thoreau and Emerson. Many folks in this congregation identify deeply with her work. We are going to be moving into some activities this morning, but before we do,

some words from Mary herself.<sup>1</sup> In 2015 she granted a rare interview, with Krista Tippett from On Being. Mary said of poetry:

...It's very sacred. It wishes for a community. It's a community ritual, certainly. And that's why, when you write a poem, you write it for anybody and everybody. And you have to be ready to do that out of your single self. It's a giving. It's always — it's a gift. It's a gift to yourself but it's a gift to anybody who has a hunger for it.

... I do think poetry has enticements of sound that are different from literature. Literature certainly has it too, or some literature, the best literature. And it's easier for people to remember. People are more apt to remember a poem and therefore feel they own it and can speak it to themselves as you might a prayer — than they can remember a chapter and quote it. That's very important because then it belongs to you. You have it when you need it. Poetry is certainly closer to singing than prose. And singing is something that we all love to do or wish we could do.

Mary Oliver's writing on attention and how we connect with writing and nature are profound and a gift to us still.

Look, the trees are turning  
their own bodies into pillars of light,  
are giving off the rich fragrance of cinnamon  
and fulfillment,

the long tapers of cattails  
are bursting and floating away over  
the blue shoulders of the ponds,  
and every pond, no matter what its  
name is, is nameless now.  
Every year, everything I have ever learned in my lifetime  
leads back to this: the fires  
and the black river of loss whose other side

is salvation, whose meaning  
none of us will ever know.  
To live in this world

you must be able  
to do three things:  
to love what is mortal;  
to hold it against your bones knowing  
your own life depends on it;  
and, when the time comes to let it go,  
to let it go.<sup>2</sup>

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1 <https://onbeing.org/programs/mary-oliver-listening-to-the-world-jan2019/>

2 "In Blackwater Woods" by Mary Oliver, from *American Primitive*. © Back Bay Books, 1983.

So may it be.

### ACTIVITY

For our activity this morning we have three options:

1. Attend a beginning poetry writing workshop for all ages with Ray Garnett – in the social hall
2. Engage in conversation with Jan Hutchinson on acceptance of impermanence in Mary Oliver’s poetry – front of the sanctuary
3. Work on a cool art project using words from Mary Oliver’s poetry with Marion Jansen - back of the sanctuary

### REFLECTION

As you go out into the world this week, we are invited to carry some of Mary Oliver’s wisdom with us. Take a moment and reflect on your experience in your activity. What are you taking with you today? Maybe a word, or a favorite poem, an idea, something of meaning that can help us to pay attention, get outside, share in community. Hold that for a moment in your mind.

### Breakage

I go down to the edge of the sea.  
How everything shines in the morning light!  
The cusp of the whelk,  
the broken cupboard of the clam,  
the opened, blue mussels,  
moon snails, pale pink and barnacle scarred—  
and nothing at all whole or shut, but tattered, split,  
dropped by the gulls onto the gray rocks and all the moisture gone.  
It's like a schoolhouse  
of little words,  
thousands of words.  
First you figure out what each one means by itself,  
the jingle, the periwinkle, the scallop  
full of moonlight.

Then you begin, slowly, to read the whole story.<sup>3</sup>

### CLOSING WORDS

Our closing poem from Mary Oliver, from *Felicity*

### Humility

Poems arrive ready to begin.  
Poets are only the transportation.

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3 Mary Oliver “Breakage” <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/41917/breakage>