

PERCY (NINE)

*Your friend is coming I say
To Percy, and name a name*

*And he runs to the door, his
Wide mouth in its laugh-shape,*

*And waves, since he has one, his tail,
Emerson, I am trying to live,*

*As you said we must, the examined life.
But there are days I wish*

*There was less in my head to examine,
Not to speak of the busy heart.*

*How would it be to be Percy, I wonder,
Not thinking, not weighing anything,
just running forward.*



Of The Empire

*We will be known as a culture
That feared death
And adored power,
That tried to vanquish insecurity
For the few and cared little for
The penury of the many.*

*We will be known as a culture that taught
And rewarded the amassing of things,
That spoke little if at all about
Quality of life for people (other people),
For dogs, for rivers.*

*All the world, in our eyes,
They will say, was a commodity.
And they will say that this structure was
Held together politically, which it was,
And they will also say that our politics
Was no more than an apparatus
To accommodate the feelings of the heart,
And that the heart, in those days,
Was small, and hard, and full of meanness.*

**Mary Oliver—
A BRIDE MARRIED TO AMAZEMENT**



it is a serious thing // just to be alive
/ on this fresh morning / in this
broken world.

— *Mary Oliver* —

ADULT EDUCATION SCHEDULE:

*February 4 – Mary Oliver
February 25 – Rainer Maria Rilke
March 11 – T.S. Eliot
March 25 – John O’Donohue
April 8 – Flannery O’Connor
April 22 – Chief Seattle
May 13 – Annie Dillard
May 27 – Wendell Berry*

THE SUMMER DAY

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean -
The one who has flung herself out of the grass,
The one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
Who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down -
Who is gazing around with her enormous eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
Into the grass, how to kneel in the grass, how to be idle and blessed,
How to stroll through fields
Which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
**Tell me, what it is you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?**



- ◆ *What is your initial response to this poem?*
- ◆ *What images capture your attention?*
- ◆ *And why, or why not?*
- ◆ *What does this poem say to your life?*
- ◆ *How does this poem comfort or challenge you?*
- ◆ *Where or how might this poem inform your faith journey?*
- ◆ *What do you plan to do with your life?*
- ◆ *What have you done with your life?*

INVITATION

*Oh do you have time
To linger
For just a little while
Out of your busy
And very important day
For the goldfinches
That have gathered
In a field of thistles
For a musical battle,
To see who can sing
The highest note,
Or the lowest,
Or the most expressive of mirth,
Or the most tender?
Their strong, blunt beaks
Drink the air
As they strive
Melodiously
Not for your sake
And not for mine
And not for the sake of winning
But for sheer delight and gratitude - believe us, they say,
It is a serious thing
Just to be alive
On this fresh morning
In this broken world
I beg of you,
Do not walk by
Without pausing
To attend to this
Rather ridiculous performance.
It could mean something.
It could mean everything.
It could be what Rilke meant, when he wrote:
You must change your life.*

ANOTHER EVERYDAY POEM

*Every day
I consider
The lilies
How they are dressed -*

*And the ravens -
How they are fed -
And how each of these
Is a miracle*

*Of Lord-love
And of sorrow -
For the lilies
In their bright dresses*

*Cannot last
But wrinkle fast
And fall,
And the little ravens*

*In their windy next
Rise up
In such pleasure
At the sight*

*Of fresh meat
That makes their lives sweet -
And what a puzzle it is
That such brevity -*

*The lavish clothes,
The ruddy food -
Makes the world
So full, so good.*

When Death Comes

When death comes like the hungry bear in autumn;
When death comes and takes all the bright coins
From his purse to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;
When death comes like the measles-pox
When death comes like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,
I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:
What is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?
And therefore I look upon everything as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,
And I look upon time as no more than an idea,
And I consider eternity as another possibility,
And I think of each life as a flower, as common as a field daisy,
And as singular, and each name a comfortable music in the mouth,
Tending, as all music does, toward silence,
And each body a lion of courage, and something precious to the earth.

**When it's over, I want to say all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.**

When it's over, I don't want to wonder if I have made
Of my life something particular, and real.

I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,
Or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited the world.



- ◆ *How might this poem speak to your faith?*
- ◆ *Do you think of death as a "cottage?"*
- ◆ *What does this image conjure up for you?*
- ◆ *Instead of death being feared, Oliver speaks of it inspiring "curiosity." Is this a comforting or challenging concept for you?*
- ◆ *What do you think it means to be a "bride married to amazement?"*
- ◆ *How might we live so as not to simply have "visited the world?"*

WILD GEESE

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
Love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
Are moving across the landscapes, over the prairies
And the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
Are heading home again.
**Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
The world offers itself to your imagination,
Calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
Over and over announcing your place
In the family of things.**



- ◆ *What image do wild geese conjure up in your mind?*
- ◆ *How can we “love what we love?”*
- ◆ *Do you imagine you have a place in the “family of things?”*
- ◆ *What does this mean to you?*
- ◆ *What does it mean to you to have the world offer itself to your imagination?*
- ◆ *What does this poem say to you about your faith?*

THE SWEETNESS OF DOGS

What do you say, Percy?
I am thinking
of sitting out on the sand to watch
the moon rise. It’s full tonight.
So we go and the moon rises,
So beautiful it makes me shudder,
Makes me think about time and space,
Makes me take measure of myself:
One iota pondering heaven.
Thus we sit, myself thinking how grateful
I am for the moon’s perfect beauty and also,
Oh! how rich it is to love the world.
**Percy, meanwhile, leans against me
And gazes up into my face.
As though I were just as wonderful
As the perfect moon.**



- ◆ *What can we learn from dogs? Or other animals?*
- ◆ *What might it feel like to have Percy gaze into our face?*
- ◆ *Do you ever think that God might look at us with this gaze like Percy’s?*
- ◆ *When we fill our minds with lots of stuff do we miss out on the joy of the moment?*
- ◆ *How might we be more present to the moment like Percy? What difference might it make to us?*