

A Requiem in Common: for our Friends and Neighbors

Wednesday, April 13, 2022

Therefore you, too, have
grief now. But I will see
you again, and your heart
will rejoice, and no one will
take your joy away from
you.

John 16:22

The Plymouth Church in Framingham

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The Fourth Sign of the Zodiac

by Mary Oliver

1.

Why should I have been surprised?
Hunters walk the forest
without a sound.

The hunter, strapped to his rifle,
the fox on his feet of silk,
the serpent on his empire of muscles—
all move in a stillness,
hungry, careful, intent.

Just as the cancer
entered the forest of my body,
without a sound.

2.

The question is,
what will it be like
after the last day?

Will I float
into the sky
or will I fray
within the earth or a river—
remembering nothing?

How desperate I would be
if I couldn't remember
the sun rising, if I couldn't
remember trees, rivers; if I couldn't
even remember, beloved,
your beloved name.

3.

I know, you never intended to be in this world.
But you're in it all the same.

so why not get started immediately.

I mean, belonging to it.
There is so much to admire, to weep over.

And to write music or poems about.

Bless the feet that take you to and fro.
Bless the eyes and the listening ears.
Bless the tongue, the marvel of taste.
Bless touching.

You could live a hundred years, it's happened.
Or not.

I am speaking from the fortunate platform
of many years,
none of which, I think, I ever wasted.
Do you need a prod?

Do you need a little darkness to get you going?
Let me be urgent as a knife, then,
and remind you of Keats,
so single of purpose and thinking, for a while,
he had a lifetime.

4.

Late yesterday afternoon, in the heat,
all the fragile blue flowers in bloom
in the shrubs in the yard next door had
tumbled from the shrubs and lay
wrinkled and fading in the grass. But
this morning the shrubs were full of
the blue flowers again. There wasn't
a single one on the grass. How, I
wondered, did they roll back up to
the branches, that fiercely wanting,
as we all do, just a little more of
life?

A Requiem in Common

Prelude, "Traumerai" by Robert Schumann

Opening Scripture

Gathering Hymn, "Abide With Me" #209

Greeting

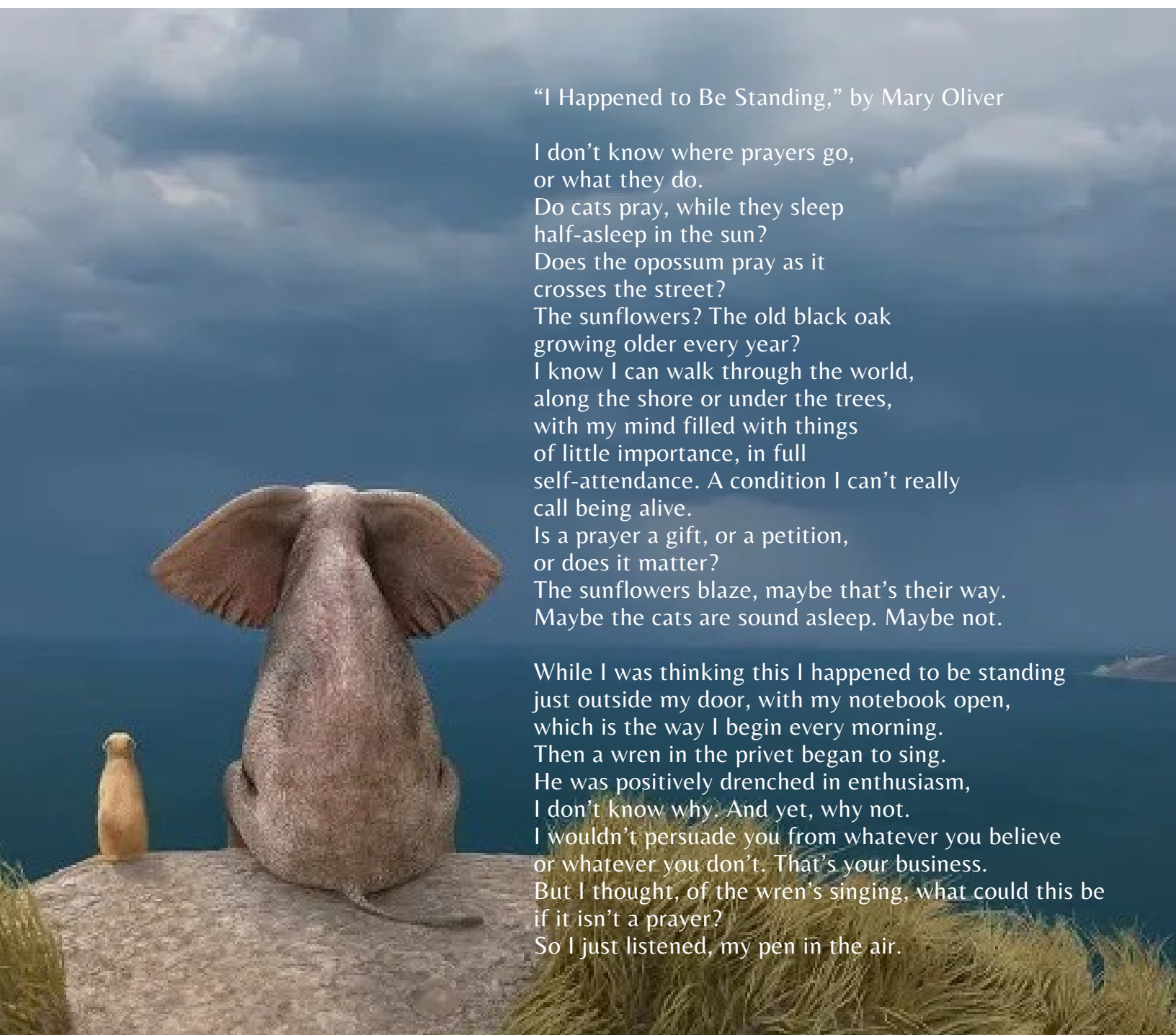
Opening Prayer & 23rd Psalm

Isaiah 40:3-5, 28-31

"I Happened to Be Standing," by Mary Oliver

I don't know where prayers go,
or what they do.
Do cats pray, while they sleep
half-asleep in the sun?
Does the opossum pray as it
crosses the street?
The sunflowers? The old black oak
growing older every year?
I know I can walk through the world,
along the shore or under the trees,
with my mind filled with things
of little importance, in full
self-attendance. A condition I can't really
call being alive.
Is a prayer a gift, or a petition,
or does it matter?
The sunflowers blaze, maybe that's their way.
Maybe the cats are sound asleep. Maybe not.

While I was thinking this I happened to be standing
just outside my door, with my notebook open,
which is the way I begin every morning.
Then a wren in the privet began to sing.
He was positively drenched in enthusiasm,
I don't know why. And yet, why not.
I wouldn't persuade you from whatever you believe
or whatever you don't. That's your business.
But I thought, of the wren's singing, what could this be
if it isn't a prayer?
So I just listened, my pen in the air.



John 15:10-15

Remembrances

Offer an image of your beloved.
Speak their name, that we might add them to our prayer.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Silence

Committal

The Lord's Prayer

Closing Hymn, "Be Still My Soul" #77

"The Fourth Sign of the Zodiac," by Mary Oliver

Benediction

Postlude, "Home" by Ola Gjeilo



The 23rd Psalm

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul:
he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil;
my cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.