

## ***“Joy in the Bible” ...with guest speaker Morgan Holick***

### **Theme: Christmas and Joy**

Sermon Scripture: Psalm 16 (NRSV)

This week's Meditation Moments include poetry by Mary Oliver. All of her poems printed below can be found in *“Devotions”* which is a large collection of her poetry. Mary died on January 17th of this year and left behind a void in the poetry world. She loved the Lord and was regarded as “far and away, this country's best-selling poet” by *The New York Times*. Rest with Jesus, Mary.

**Monday:** Happy Advent, friends! Advent is a season we set aside to intentionally wait in hopeful expectation of the birth of Jesus Christ. It also marks to beginning of the liturgical calendar in the western church. That being said, Advent is much more than a countdown to Christmas. Through the person of Jesus, God fulfilled the promise to reconcile us as a broken people to God's perfect, holy self. Advent invites us to make this truth our anchoring joy. This joy is different than the joy we get from this world. Linger over these words by Mary Oliver as you ponder the joy of advent. Perhaps allow them to be your prayer today as you re-posture yourself towards our God. Do the hard, internal work. Joy unspeakable is waiting for you.

#### Don't Hesitate

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate.

Give in to it.

There are plenty of lives and whole towns destroyed or about to be.

We are not wise, and not very often kind.

And much can never be redeemed.

Still, life has some possibility left.

Perhaps this is its way of fighting back, that sometimes something happens better than all the riches or power in the world.

It could be anything, but very likely you notice it in the instant when love begins.

Anyway, that's often the case.

Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid of its plenty.

Joy is not made to be a crumb.

-Mary Oliver

**Tuesday:** In Psalm 16:11, King David tells us that there is a fullness of joy in God's presence. God's presence is already here, surrounding us at every turn. The question is whether or not we are paying close enough attention to avoid missing out on the joy that lies right in front of us. Remember, my Texas friend had his eyes glued to his phone as we drove past Vallecito Lake. He missed out on the best part because his attention was elsewhere. An important part of knowing God's presence is being fully present ourselves. The poem below by Mary Oliver points to how devastating life can be when our focus and attention skip the very God-given moments that are upon us. Silently read the poem once or twice and think about the worries you allow to pull you away from being fully present. Ask God to help you surrender your worries so that you may experience the fullness of joy that awaits you.

#### I Worried

I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers flow in the right direction, will the earth turn as it was taught, and if not, how shall I correct it?

Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven, can I do better?  
Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows can do it and I am, well, hopeless.  
Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it, am I going to get rheumatism, lockjaw, dementia?  
Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing. And gave it up. And took my old body and went out into the morning, and sang.

*-Mary Oliver*

**Wednesday:** We were created to know the joy of the Lord. When we settle for the pleasures of this world, we are robbing ourselves of something sweet, holy, and empowering. Joy is what enabled Christ to endure the ultimate trial: the cross. What pleasures do you find yourself settling for? Remember, the source of our joy determines when it runs out. Are you drawing from Love's unending well? In the following poem, Mary Oliver points out the exquisite nature of God. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we will know without a doubt Who we are looking towards. Read over her words slowly and ask yourself, "who or what is the source of my joy?"

#### I Wake Close to Morning

Why do people keep asking to see God's identity papers when the darkness opening into morning is more than enough?

Certainly any god might turn away in disgust.

Think of Sheba approaching the kingdom of Solomon.

Do you think she had to ask, "Is this the place?"

*-Mary Oliver*

**Thursday:** Joy is not the absence of sadness. We have been told that we will experience trials in this world. Fixing our eyes on Jesus does not mean we won't feel the cuts of grief. While joy was what enabled Christ to endure the cross, we can still hear his cry of grief that sounded something like "Father, why have you left me here in this misery?" While sadness is necessarily a part of life, we cling to the promise that we will never be cut-off. We cannot drift away from the redeeming and joy-filled presence of God. This truth is our joy. We can allow grief to sell us the lie that God cannot possibly be with us, or we can let grief be the thing that develops our perseverance. Let's run the race God has set before us faithfully. Take some time to read the short poem below. What trials have you endured? Where was God in the midst of them? Remember, storms can throw you about but if you learn to rest in the waves instead of fighting against them then you will find yourself carried safely back to shore.

#### We Shake with Joy

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

*-Mary Oliver*

**Friday:** In Psalm 16:5, King David tells us that the Lord is something we choose. We are not forced to know Joy or even Love for that matter. We have to be intentional about seeking God to know these things. We have to pay attention and fully show up to every moment the Lord gifts us with. We have to prioritize our lives in a way that allow us to be sure of Who is running the control panels of our Joy. Mary Oliver certainly knew something about paying attention and showing up to the moment. She also knew something about surrounding herself with people who do the same. Do you find yourself looking for God throughout your day? Do you have friends who point out the work of God to you?

#### Mysteries, Yes

Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous to be understood.

How grass can be nourishing in the mouths of the lambs.

How rivers and stones are forever in allegiance with gravity while we ourselves dream of rising.

How two hands touch and the bonds will never be broken.

How people come, from delight or the scars of damage,

to the comfort of a poem.

Let me keep my distance, always, from those who think they have the answers.

Let me keep company always with those who say "Look!" and laugh in astonishment, and bow their heads.

*-Mary Oliver*

**Saturday:** Joy is so much more than anything this world has to offer. Jesus knew that. Isaac Watts knew that. Do you know that? Is Joy worth changing your life for? If your answer is "yes" then you are in good company.

Invitation (an excerpt)

...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.*