

Jim Thompson's Spiritual Poetry Class #71

Wednesday, October 6, 2021

5 pm PT

Dear Friends:

Tish Harrison Warren, said, "**Poems slow us down.**"

If poems did only this, they would be invaluable. Our poems this week are ones to dawdle over.

- **The Black Walnut Tree** by Mary Oliver. No crawling with shame for Mary and her mother!
- **The Word** by Tony Hoagland. Slowing down to find the time to sit out in the sun and listen.
- **Sister Cat** by Frances Mayes. Wanting the light on when the light is on...

Here's the link for this week:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81374816274?pwd=eG1PRUxoWC9iTjFaTHFBNTBrNklvQT09>

Passcode: 704824

Note: This link and passcode is good for classes through October 27, 2021

+ + Jim

The Black Walnut Tree

—Mary Oliver

My mother and I debate:
we could sell
the black walnut tree
to the lumberman,
and pay off the mortgage.
Likely some storm anyway
will churn down its dark boughs,
smashing the house. We talk
slowly, two women trying
in a difficult time to be wise.
Roots in the cellar drains,
I say, and she replies
that the leaves are getting heavier
every year, and the fruit
harder to gather away.
But something brighter than money
moves in our blood—an edge
sharp and quick as a trowel
that wants us to dig and sow.
So we talk, but we don't do
anything. That night I dream
of my fathers out of Bohemia
filling the blue fields
of fresh and generous Ohio
with leaves and vines and orchards.
What my mother and I both know
is that we'd crawl with shame
in the emptiness we'd made
in our own and our fathers' backyard.
So the black walnut tree
swings through another year
of sun and leaping winds,
of leaves and bounding fruit,
and, month after month, the whip-
crack of the mortgage.

The Word

—Tony Hoagland

Down near the bottom
of the crossed-out list
of things you have to do today,

between "green thread"
and "broccoli," you find
that you have penciled "sunlight."

Resting on the page, the word
is beautiful. It touches you
as if you had a friend

and sunlight were a present
he had sent from someplace distant
as this morning—to cheer you up,

and to remind you that,
among your duties, pleasure
is a thing

that also needs accomplishing.
Do you remember?
that time and light are kinds

of love, and love
is no less practical
than a coffee grinder

or a safe spare tire?
Tomorrow you may be utterly
without a clue,

but today you get a telegram
from the heart in exile,
proclaiming that the kingdom

still exists,
the king and queen alive,
still speaking to their children,

—to any one among them
who can find the time
to sit out in the sun and listen.

Sister Cat

—Frances Mayes

Cat stands at the fridge,
Cries loudly for milk.
But I've filled her bowl.
Wild cat, I say, Sister,
Look, you *have* milk.
I clink my fingernail
Against the rim. *Milk.*
With *down* and *liver*,
A word I know she hears.
Her sad miaow. She runs
To me. She dips
In her whiskers but
Doesn't drink. As sometimes
I want the light on
When it is on. Or when
I saw the woman walking
toward my house and
I thought *there's Frances.*
Then looked in the car mirror
To be sure. She stalks
The room. She wants. Milk
Beyond milk. World beyond
This one, she cries.