

*“Gently into the Morning”*  
A Service of Poetry  
(created by the Sunday Service Committee)  
June 9, 2019

“Morning Poem” by Mary Oliver  
(presented by Margaret Rieser)

Every morning  
the world  
is created.  
Under the orange

sticks of the sun  
the heaped  
ashes of the night  
turn into leaves again

and fasten themselves to the high branches—  
and the ponds appear  
like black cloth  
on which are painted islands

of summer lilies.  
If it is your nature  
to be happy  
you will swim away along the soft trails

for hours, your imagination  
alighting everywhere.  
And if your spirit  
carries within it

the thorn  
that is heavier than lead—  
if it's all you can do  
to keep on trudging—

there is still  
somewhere deep within you  
a beast shouting that the earth  
is exactly what it wanted—

each pond with its blazing lilies  
is a prayer heard and answered

lavishly,  
every morning,

whether or not  
you have ever dared to be happy,  
whether or not  
you have ever dared to pray.

“What Song” by UU Rev. Victoria Safford  
(presented by John Mersfelder)

What if there were a universe that began in shining blackness, out of nothing, out of fire, out of a single, silent breath, and into it came billions and billions of stars, stars beyond imagining, and near one of them a world, a blue-green world so beautiful that learned clergymen could not even speak about it cogently, and brilliant scientists in trying to describe it began to sound like poets.

What if there were a universe in which a world was born out of a smallish star, and into that world (at some point) flew red-winged blackbirds, and into it swam sperm whales, and into it came crocuses, and wind to lift the tiniest hairs on naked arms in spring. Into that world came animals and elements and plants, and imagination, the mind and the mind’s eye.

If such a world existed and you noticed it, what would you do? What song would come out of your mouth, what prayer, what praises, what sacred offering, what whirling dance, what religion, and what reverential gesture would you make to greet that world, every single day that you were in it?

“Dharma” by Billy Collins  
(with a reflection from Betsy Loughran)

My job is to read a poem that gets us off to a good start on an ordinary morning. At my house, that start is often a cold nose nudging me awake, reminding me that the sun is up, and it’s past time that I got up. My Andy is now as old as I am so that nudge isn’t quite what it was a few years ago. But we do our morning chores, slurp down some breakfast, and then head out the door.

Andy needs nothing for this expedition, but I don my new bug jacket – a wondrous invention that the Banderobs introduced me to recently. If I am to have any kind of “spiritual” experience, at the least, I need freedom from the black flies. We head up Hemenway Road, a dirt road that leads up to the fire tower on Great Hill.

This time of year it’s a constantly changing path as brief blooms of wild flowers succeed each other. Two weeks ago it was trillium – painted and purple – pale yellow bellwort, and

hobblebush. This week the lady slippers are in bloom along with the delicate yellow clintonia, and tiny star flowers. The fields are awash in strawberry blossoms and mayflowers. Even with climate change, mayflowers bloom in June around here.

What Andy and I love about this walk is that it is a pure gift. No weeding, no planting – only the beauty for me and the fascinating smells for Andy. Billy Collins has this one right:

*“Dharma” by Billy Collins*

The way the dog trots out the front door  
every morning  
without a hat or an umbrella,  
without any money  
or the keys to her doghouse-  
never fails to fill the saucer of my heart  
with milky admiration.

Who provides a finer example  
of a life without encumbrance—  
Thoreau in his curtainless hut  
with a single plate, a single spoon?  
Gandhi with his staff and his holy diapers?

Off she goes into the material world  
with nothing but her brown coat  
and her modest blue collar,  
following only her wet nose,  
the twin portals of her steady breathing,  
followed only by the plume of her tail.

If only she did not shove the cat aside  
every morning  
and eat all his food  
what a model of self-containment she  
would be,  
what a paragon of earthly detachment.  
If only she were not so eager  
for a rub behind the ears,  
so acrobatic in her welcomes,  
if only I were not her god.