

The Still Point
A Time of Meditation and Reflection
The Third Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 6

... At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance...

T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

Peace on each one who comes in need;
Peace on each one who comes in joy.
Peace on each one who offers prayers;
Peace on each one who offers song.
Peace of the Maker, Peace of the Son,
Peace of the Spirit, the Triune One.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
by your grace alone
we are accepted and called to your service;
strengthen us by your Holy Spirit and empower our calling;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Scripture Reading

Mark 4:26-34

Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come." He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Poem: “I Worried”

by Mary Oliver

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.

Meditation:

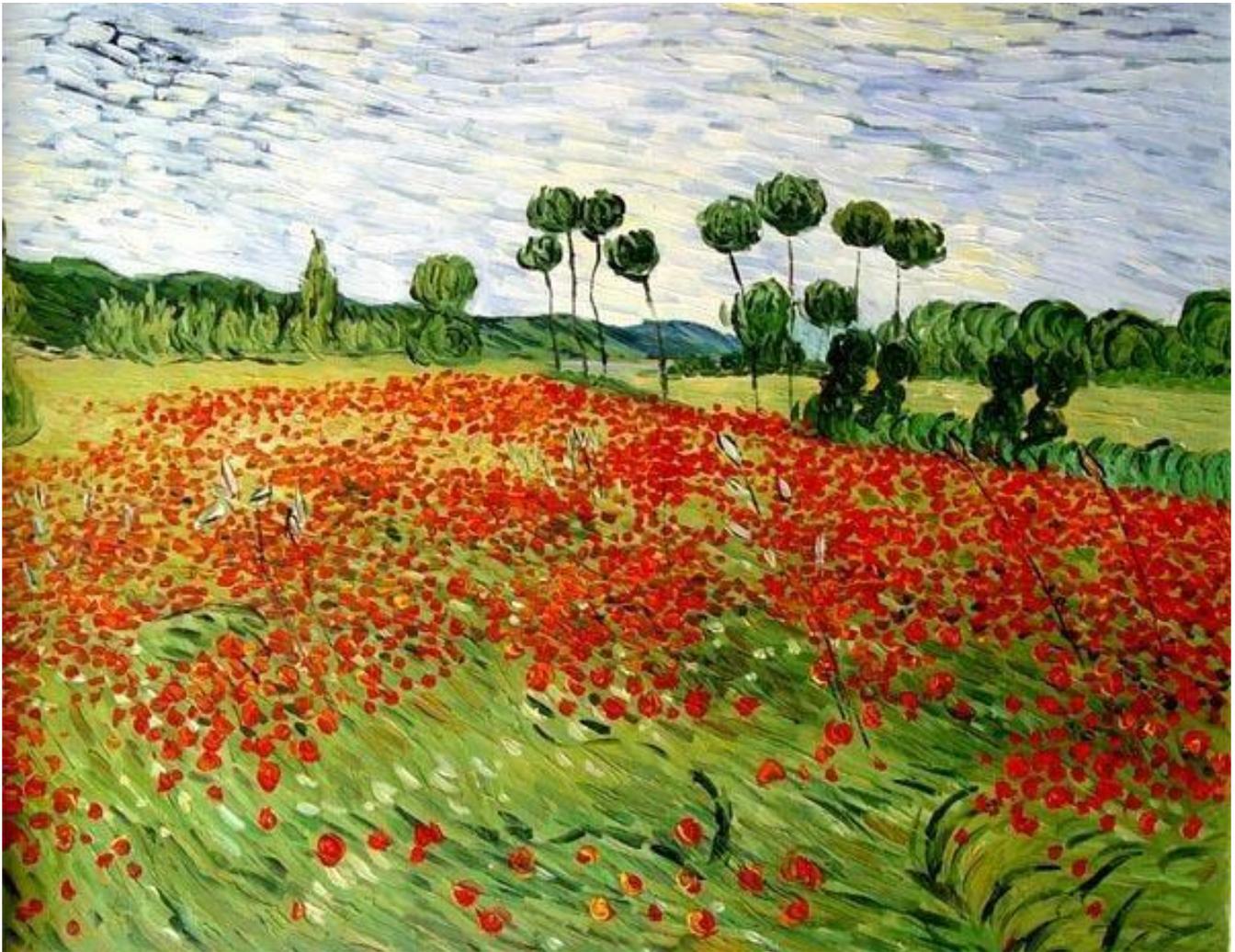
The gospel passage contains perhaps the best-known and best-loved of Jesus’ parables of the kingdom: the tiny mustard seed that contains within itself the potential of the great tree, which offers shelter to all the birds of the air. But the parable that comes before it also has transformative power, when we can stop and wonder within it. The sower scatters seed, but the miracle of growth is made possible not by the sower, but by the earth itself. The partnership between sower, seed, and earth, brings forth fruit only when each partner acts according to its nature.

The poem – though more clearly a response to Jesus’ sayings in the Sermon on the Mount (“why do you worry about your life... consider the birds of the air... consider the lilies of the field...”) – can be in dialogue with this gospel as well. It offers us a way into a gracious humility, where we see our proper place in the harmony of creation. We have a role, an essential role, in tending the things of earth. But the bounty of the harvest, for all our care, and all our knowledge, remains a mystery beyond our understanding. Acceptance of our limitations, our inability to control anything by worrying, sets us free to embrace the most essential task of the children of God – joyful song, like the birds’, in response to the goodness of creation.

Questions for Reflection:

Worry has been a constant for most of us during this time. Have there been moments when you have gotten free of worry? Have there been moments when you, like the poet, have let all your preoccupations slip away, so that you could go out into the morning and sing? If so, do the gospel parables and the poem help you recapture that? If you have been beset by worry all the time, is there anything in the gospel parables or poem that opens up a space where you might let some worry go?

If you spend some time with van Gogh's "Wheat Field with Poppies" (1887), how does it speak to you of the wisdom of Jesus' parable: the earth produces of itself?



Prayers

We bring before God someone whom we have met or remembered today

We bring to God someone who is hurting tonight and needs our prayer

We bring to God a troubled situation in our world

We bring to God, silently, someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust

We bring ourselves to God that we might grow in generosity of spirit, clarity of mind, and warmth of affection

We offer our thanks to God for the blessings in our lives

We name before God those who have died.

Gracious God, you hear all our prayers: those we speak aloud, those we hold in our hearts, and those prayers for which we have no words. Hear the prayers of your people, and grant them as may be best for us, for the sake of your holy name. **Amen.**

Accept our thanks for all you have done, O God. Our hands were empty, and you filled them.

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with us every step of the way, and be our guide as our road changes and turns, and the blessing of God our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life be among us now and remain with us forever. **Amen.**