

# Thought for the day 5 – 11 July 2021

## by Rev. Alan Stewart – Mary Oliver

A few years ago, I encountered the poems of Mary Oliver for the first time. I share them with you in the hope that they will delight and inspire you as much as they have me.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-oliver>

### Monday

#### The Summer Day by Mary Oliver



Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean —  
the one who had flung herself out of  
the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down —  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields  
which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

# Tuesday 6th

## **Wild Geese** **by Mary Oliver**

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.



# Wednesday 7th

## 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.



**Thursday 8<sup>th</sup>**

**Messenger**  
**by Mary Oliver**



My work is loving the world.  
Here the sunflowers, there the  
hummingbird—  
equal seekers of sweetness.  
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.  
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?  
Am I no longer young, and still half-perfect? Let me  
keep my mind on what matters,  
which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and learning to be  
astonished.

The phoebe, the delphinium.

The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.

Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,

which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart  
and these body-clothes,  
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy  
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,  
telling them all, over and over, how it is  
that we live forever.

## **Friday 9th**

### **Praying**

**by Mary Oliver**

It doesn't have to be the blue iris, it could be weeds in a vacant lot, or a few small stones; just pay attention, then patch a few words together and don't try to make them elaborate, this isn't a contest but the doorway into thanks, and a silence in which another voice may speak.



## Saturday 10th

### When I am among trees by Mary Oliver

When I am among the trees,  
especially the willows and the honey locust,  
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,  
they give off such hints of gladness.  
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.



I am so distant from the hope of  
myself,  
in which I have goodness, and  
discernment,  
and never hurry through the world  
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their  
leaves  
and call out, "Stay awhile."  
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,  
"and you too have come  
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled  
with light, and to shine."

# Sunday 11th

## The Gift by Mary Oliver

"Be still, my soul, and steadfast,  
Earth and heaven both are still watching  
though time is draining from the clock  
and your walk, that was confident and quick,  
has become slow.

"So, be slow if you must, but let  
the heart still play its true part.  
Love still as once you loved, deeply  
and without patience. Let God and the world  
know you are grateful. That the gift has been given."

