

Palimpsest* (pa • limp • sest)

Week of **November 28, 2021**
First Sunday of Advent

Sermon: Glimpsing God in Poetry
Scripture: John 1:1

Sermon Supplemental Reading

In Singapore, in the airport, / A darkness was ripped from my eyes.
In the women's restroom, one compartment stood open.
A woman knelt there, washing something in the white bowl.
Disgust argued in my stomach / and I felt, in my pocket, for my ticket.
A poem should always have birds in it.
Kingfishers, say, with their bold eyes and gaudy wings.
Rivers are pleasant, and of course trees.
A waterfall, or if that's not possible, a fountain rising and falling.
A person wants to stand in a happy place, in a poem.
When the woman turned I could not answer her face.
Her beauty and her embarrassment struggled together,
and neither could win.
She smiled and I smiled. What kind of nonsense is this?
Everybody needs a job.
Yes, a person wants to stand in a happy place, in a poem.
But first we must watch her as she stares down at her labor, / which is dull enough.
She is washing the tops of the airport ashtrays, as big as hubcaps,
with a blue rag.
Her small hands turn the metal, scrubbing and rinsing.
She does not work slowly, nor quickly, like a river.
Her dark hair is like the wing of a bird.
I don't doubt for a moment that she loves her life.
And I want her to rise up from the crust and the slop and / fly down to the river.
This probably won't happen. / But maybe it will.
If the world were only pain and logic, who would want it?
Of course, it isn't. / Neither do I mean anything miraculous, but only
the light that can shine out of a life. I mean
the way she unfolded and refolded the blue cloth,
The way her smile was only for my sake; I mean
the way this poem is filled with trees, and birds.

– Oliver, M. "Singapore"

* A Palimpsest is: 1: writing material (as a parchment or tablet) used one or more times, 2: something having unusually diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface

How necessary it is to have opinions! I think the spotted trout lilies are satisfied, standing a few inches above the earth. I think serenity is not something you just find in the world, like a plum tree, holding up its white petals.

The violets, along the river, are opening their blue faces, like small dark lanterns.

The green mosses, being so many, are as good as brawny.

How important it is to walk along, not in haste but slowly, looking at everything and calling out

Yes! No! The

swan, for all his pomp, his robes of grass and petals, wants only to be allowed to live on the nameless pond. The catbrier is without fault. The water thrushes, down among the sloppy rocks, are going crazy with happiness. Imagination is better than a sharp instrument. To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work.

- Oliver, M. "Yes! No!"

Questions

- In what ways do you best pay attention to the world around you? What helps you to see what God is up to?
- Why does John use the image of Word for Christ? How does this help us understand the Christmas story?
- What are you paying attention to just now?

Notes
