

Turning to the Mystics



St. John of the Cross: Dialogue 6
with James Finley

Jim Finley: Greetings. I'm Jim Finley-

Kirsten Oates: ... and I'm Kirsten Oates.

Jim Finley: Welcome to Turning to the Mystics.

Kirsten Oates: Welcome. We're here to talk about Session 7, your Session 7, Lectio, Jim, on the mystic John of the Cross. Thank you for being here.

Jim Finley: Glad to be with you again, this is great.

Kirsten Oates: So we thought we were in deep, but we're just... It's like a brain teaser we're in right now, which is to say that we're trying to understand something that our finite self can't understand.

Jim Finley: Exactly. It's exactly right. We'll see how it goes.

Kirsten Oates: I was going to suggest that we just have our infinite selves have this dialogue and then it would all become very clear, but I guess-

Jim Finley: To the infinite self, yes.

Kirsten Oates: That would just be silence for everyone listening.

Jim Finley: I think in other way... In a way, you're touching on something important to this too, is that we're talking about a certain experiential oneness with God in which there's an inner certainty regarding it in your heart. And you can't explain it.

Kirsten Oates: Hm.

Jim Finley: You can't explain it. It's like Teresa of Avila, the beginning of the fourth mansion, that you realize you're in a realm where the time has come to love. The trouble with third-mansion people is that it has not yet... It's entirely too reasonable. And this becomes kind of divinely unreasonable. And then it's an overflow of oneness, that you've experienced it in your heart, but you can't begin to explain what's happening to you and he's offering guidance in how to conduct ourselves and that's kind of a subtle state.

Kirsten Oates: You said in the podcast itself, actually, we're not sitting with this to understand it, so what you said just now is the kind of understanding we're looking for, which is more like a certainty in our heart. And when we hear the words, we don't understand them. We might not understand them, but there's a sense of the truth in our heart.

Jim Finley: Yeah, exactly. And that's why, when we talk about it, two people who have tasted it talk about it, neither one can explain what they're talking about, but they mutually recognize what they're talking about. You know, the intimacy. And then he's offering guidance in this, how that deepens and develops a certain kind of mystical understanding that's trans-conceptual. It's not an understanding of a concept, a bit of an obscure clarity in your heart, that's transforming you into this love.

Kirsten Oates: What's amazing about John of the Cross, given what we're saying right now, is how many

words he was able to write. He was a prolific writer and particularly around the dark night and this unity of experience.

Jim Finley: Yes. You know what I think it's like, that reminds me of? It's like saying two people that have been married and who have loved each other for a long, long time. And when they speak of their love, they say many things because it's a many-faceted thing, it turns this way and then that way, and it offers this and it offers that, so you get the feeling of the endless kind of music of it, because it's infinite, really. It's very lovely, actually.

Kirsten Oates: Would you say, Jim, that someone like John of the Cross would be writing from that certainty in his heart, that the words would flow with that heart certainty in the mix?

Jim Finley: That's exactly it. I told how he wrote this poem when he was in prison, that's when he was going through that dark night, and it just burst forth like it's a flow of poetic love. And so when he got out of the prison and they asked him to comment, "What's it mean?" He was always explicating what was poetically giving to him in the flow of it itself. And when he starts the Living Flame of Love, this mystical marriage, he said, "I waited until the love reached such a depth, an overwhelming depth, which was even possible to say such things. So it was like a flow. It's putting words to things that words can't say. In other words, it's putting words to things that's like music that when you listen to the musicality or the rhythm of it, it draws you into the beauty of it. And it gives you some sense of it that you're participating in it.

Kirsten Oates: This unity, this idea of unitive, the time of union or the experience of union, we're talking about something that is always happening. I keep reminding myself of that. Is that right, Jim, that the unitive experience is happening beneath the surface of what our finite experience can know?

Jim Finley: Yes. At the end of that previous session we did where I used Thomas Merton to introduce the mystical, or the inner experience, and I used that quote, where he refers to it, he says, "On that other day..." And what he's referring to is, "I'm writing this in this day, which is time, but on that other day, which is eternity, you gave me this before the origins of the universe, that is, you eternally contemplated me hidden with Christ, with you in the word as someone destined for this." So in some sense, it's from all eternity, it's always been happening in you Lord, as the divinity of myself and my nothingness without you and therefore for us right now and that, since it's our ontology, it's our very God-given godly nature as a capax Dei, as a person, but what's not constant is our experience of it.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: It's the effective union. And that's what fluctuates. So he's really talking about the transformation of conscious effective union into this love beyond the faculties of the soul. So in us, the reality of us, this is the constancy of who we are in God, but the degree and the ways in which we're aware of it is very inconsistent. It flickers, so he was trying to help us stabilize the living heart knowledge so it becomes habitual and being transformative. That's really what he's about here, right?

Kirsten Oates: Yes. You've spoken a few times during the podcast about, that during our life on this plane, that we're very grounded in the finite experience. We have to orient and operate from that

experience. But once we die, that finite self will die and we'll be left with infinite union. What I'm hearing about what you just said in terms of the eternal nature of it, did we come in to the finite from the infinite also, that that's been constant from the beginning prior to our birth-

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: ... and will continue after death?

Jim Finley: That's right. Let's say that the person that we are comes into time, in God's "let it be" in which we were created as a human being in time, and that human being in time, our human nature, is endowed with the capacity to realize it's timeless, unit of mystery as a capacity to be realized. And we realize it through flashes of mystical oneness, through love, all these quickening experiences. And then in realizing it, we're to freely choose to ascent to it, like the yield to it and to become obediently faithful to it.

Jim Finley: But on this earth, it's mediated through the faculties. So this infinite presence is mediated through our finite mind, illumined by faith, and so on. So what the mystical is, as the dark night renders us powerless to actualize this awareness of God through our faculties, so we're powerless to feel the constellation of God, to feel the warmth of God, because it's finite, God weans us off, God sees we're attached to it. God weans us off of our insights and understanding of our beliefs, and then in that powerlessness, those are the three signs of meditation that this is occurring, he said there begins to emerge this general loving awareness without regard for anything in particular.

Jim Finley: So that's the first emergence of this kind of celestial, luminous awareness beyond thought, beyond words. And the transformation happens there. It's very deep and real, but on this earth, it's always obscure to the one who realizes it because we're trying to reflect upon it in the finite consciousness as being transcended by it.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: But it's real, and it's a foreshadowing. In heaven, it'll be crystal clear. Also, I would say this, the finite self dies, but the finite self is also eternal in God. This was from the mythic language of the final resurrection and so on.

Jim Finley: So that this "you" and "I" right now, and this conversation we're having, because God knows we're having this conversation, because God never forgets. When we die, we'll go into having this conversation forever. That everything real is forever. And it's nothingness without God. And through this path, we become sensitized to that. The eternity, the fleetingness of everything in this love. But if I use my ego as my base of operations, it's having the final say in who I am. That's what's not forever. That's the false self, see. Who I am in my ego has a final say on who I am, but it doesn't. It's a modality in which I'm actualized, in my ego to what transcends my ego through love. That's the gist of it.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, you said in this last podcast about the reliance on the finite faculties, you used the

word “dissolve,” you say, “The finite faculties dissolved into the union.”

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: In the past, you’ve you’ve used, “The finite faculties have to die,” or “the ego has to die a kind of death.” The dying sounds quite painful, the dissolving sounds quite poetic. And I wondered, what is the experience for people?

Jim Finley: I’ll give you have an example on human love first, then I’m going to talk about the dying and the dissolving. Let’s say in human love, there can be a moment between two people in a deepening communion of love in which they feel they’re mutually, their otherness is mutually dissolving in the oneness of the love, which is kind of miraculous and wondrous to them.

Jim Finley: So the depth of it, in which you are being transformed is a dissolving. It is the separateness, is dissolving or giving away to the oneness, which the feel the immensity of that, the holiness of that. This can also happen in nature with the artist or the poet, this dissolving. The death happens. In order to yield to the dissolving, they have to let go of control. And the thing is the part of us that’s still trying to control doesn’t easily give up its claim on us. And so there’s this kind of battle that goes on in love.

Jim Finley: It’s similar to someone in AA, for the alcoholic. As they come into sobriety, it’s the dissolving in sobriety, the 11 step conscious contact with God, but what’s required is that the alcoholic in them has to die. And in so far as they’re still attached to that, because they’re an alcoholic, it’s a battle to the death one day at a time, one hour at a time. But if they stay the course and as they come across the arc and they settle in this better place, they’re so glad that they endured that death.

Jim Finley: And I think these are all modalities of the same transformative power of love. It’s always asking something out of us. Do we give up something that we cherish, but in our heart we know is holding us back? If we try to live by that and hold onto the fear, hold onto the anger, hold onto the resentment, whatever that is, that we’re always asking for love to dissolve that through love us and set us free.

Kirsten Oates: So there’s an element of the ego coming across its own powerlessness that the control it wants isn’t what it really is after.

Jim Finley: Yeah. That’s right.

Kirsten Oates: And so with John of the Cross, that powerlessness actually came through external circumstances of real powerlessness and pain and betrayal. And even when you’re talking about the alcoholic, the circumstances of life are painful. And I wonder, is it always the life circumstances always matched kind of to that sense of dying or pain?

Jim Finley: This is my understanding of it because it comes as it comes, it’s given to whom it’s given. See, I think when John of the Cross was in the prison and that dark night and had this breakthrough, this love, I think the breakthrough, the love, came only over all the years of being a steadfast and humble prayer. That is, he had already gone through the dark night in meditation and silence and love and humility and pain. He

was already becoming to the divine. And so the arduous moment was the tipping point for him.

Jim Finley: And sometimes it can happen to us out of the blue, near death experiences, all of a sudden we're quickened by it. But in order to be stabilized in it, we have to circle back and do our homework and interiorly letting go, humility patience, trust, fidelity, we have to do the inner work for it to become habituated. Because sometimes, some people when they're quite young, they're given a big taste of this and they spend the rest of their life learning to be faithful to what was given to them. And that's what spiritual direction is all about. Each person has to see where they are with respect to this. Say where have I experienced this or where have I glimpsed this? How am I on the edge of this?

Jim Finley: Because when you look at it, it isn't that there aren't visions and voices that that can happen in deep prayer states. He talks about that. When you really think about it, he's talking about things that are very delicate, very interior, very subtle. And a lot of us sometimes, just calibrating our heart to a fine enough scale to be sensitized to the delicacy of this union.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. There's something, I don't know if for me personally that I was drawn by this possibility of union and in the podcast where you said something like deep within the hidden center of ourselves is this union. And my heart quickens in hearing that, and I feel drawn to it because I feel like it's the only way to truly know myself and find myself.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: So it's kind of what draws me.

Jim Finley: That's why I suggest to people. I think so when we were done the first sessions on Merton where I said I think I got my first big taste of it, it started at age three with the trauma, but the first big taste at 14 when I was reading Thomas Merton, the Sign of Jonas. And in reading the Sign of Jonas, he kind of speaks from his heart about this deep awakening like this. And when I read it at 14 years old, the depth of the purity of that voice reached my heart. So it's like an event like you're quickened in the oneness, but your ego is kind of cluelessly wondering, what's happening? I'm being sweetly transcended in an intimate realization. But now that I've been transcended, I won't play the cynic, see, I won't betray my awakened heart.

Jim Finley: And that's why when we hear words like this, that self in us starts to resonate because it can tell it's being talked about. And it's hard to find guidance in it. That's what makes these mystics so special, it really is so subtle. Where can I find somebody well seasoned in such things? And that's what these mystics are, they're trying to help people who were being interiorly led this way.

Kirsten Oates: Part of the pain for me, Jim, when I think about the pain of the death or the dissolving is paying closer attention to my life. Part of engaging in a regular practice and those sorts of things, my attention to my life is much stronger, much clearer. And as I pay closer attention to my life, there's things that are humiliating. There's things that I can be more immediate to my experiences of judgment or shame. And so I have found personally, I'm experiencing a lot more pain in my life. I think I can also experience more joy and more connection, greater compassion, but definitely the painful side as well.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: I'm just wondering, is that part of it? To be more in touch with our lives?

Jim Finley: I think it is, I think it is. But I would think this too: up to a point that pain is a gift because it's conscience. You look back and you say, oh gosh, not one of my better moments. And maybe you went on in it for a while too, like you're in collusion with it for a while. And so part of it is conscience, grateful for the extent that you were aware out of that pain to move beyond it. So there's that. There's another deeper layer of it is that when the pain is this kind of punitive voice towards ourselves, we realize that, I think this is how I understand Jesus really, is mercy because Jesus, in that very moment you were doing those things, whatever they are, whatever I did, whatever, everybody has these stories, as a psychotherapist you listen to this all day long.

Jim Finley: Whatever we were doing, the important thing is from God's point of view, you were infinitely loved by God in the very midst of doing those things. Because as Merton, it has no tyranny over ourselves and what we did because only the love of God's sustaining us in our foolishness is the sole authority. So we're really as a kind of an ideology, a performance. See, I wasn't measuring up to my own, but in the eyes of God, we all measure up to who we are in the eyes of God. And all we have to do is see all those lessons.

Jim Finley: When you think about it, part of it was regretful. Sure enough, we probably hurt people or hurt ourselves, we need to acknowledge that, but a lot of what we know today about mercy came out of what we learned in going through those things. I think. And then it also helps us to see everybody in those eyes. We're all a work in progress and we're trying to help each other out here.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Can you repeat that? There was something beautiful you said about measuring up.

Jim Finley: Yeah, yes. That one way of understanding this is that there's the gift of it in conscience that I fell short in being the person I know in my heart, deep down, I am and I'm called to be, because I hurt myself, I hurt other people, and I went on for a while, whatever the details are. But then in so far then the real pain is that I didn't measure up to my idealized self, being ashamed that I didn't measure up to who I'm trying to be. Saying am I holy yet? Am I holy yet? Am I holy yet? See? And see what happens is then, I think this love that John of the Cross is talking about which is really mercy, that's the gift of tears, really. It's the ultimate irrelevancy of all that.

Jim Finley: And the real sin is attributing more authority to our ideals. We can't live up to over the love that loves us in our inability to live up to our ideals. I think that's called that Christ consciousness or compassion, whatever, which is wisdom, I think. And it's not licensed. Saint Paul says if we're loved this way, should we just sin all the more, God forbid? But the point is we're powerless to make God stop being infinitely in love with us. That's not for us to stay and we surrender to that and try to live by it as best we can, is my sense of it.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful, thank you.

Jim Finley: Turning to the mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: It reminds me of the image you gave in last session around God coming out of the cave and giving us a hug. And I love that. I love that image.

Jim Finley: That's a great image.

Kirsten Oates: In these moments where we feel that insecurity, anxiety, penalizing part of ourselves, we can-

Jim Finley: That's right. And by the way, that hug can come to an accepting friend, in person, it can come in prayer. We all need those hugs, the reassurance. But see in the cave in the dark night where God says, "I'm not coming out, I want you to come in here".

Jim Finley: And when you're in the dark with God, it's not your finite selves' experience of God's infinite hug, you've passed beyond your finite abilities, into the hiddenness of God, being given the hidden infinite hug of this communion. And that's the mystical part.

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: And we're always both, because I said at the end of the session, too, is... So John of the Cross, his whole life was all these stories about... We always wanted him to join us on the walks because he always made us laugh. Because he was so poor growing up, he had a special concern for the poor. He apologized when he was dying, to the superior of the house, whatever he did. And his poetry is so sensual, you get the feeling of a very present, loving, open-hearted person in the day-by-day realities of it, and it's the mark of holiness [crosstalk 00:25:03].

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, I think we can often forget about the day-to-day life of the saint or the mystic teacher. We can just be so drawn by the beauty of their words and... which isn't to say, Jim, that he might not have still had things that weren't perfect in his personality also, is it?

Jim Finley: Yeah, he probably... In his, hagiography, they weren't really into that kind of existential honesty about issues of temperament. And I'm certain that he did. But the thing is, he took responsibility for them. He was aware of them. He was always working at not giving into them and renewing his efforts. And then mystically, was aware of their ultimate irrelevance in the presence of the love that's taking us to itself. In the midst of the frail, he's deeply accepted, which is salvation.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Which is really the path to be being able to take true responsibility and have humility.

Jim Finley: It is.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. It's not the persecution or the shame or the judgment might not continue to arise, it's the way I approach it or the way I can hold up the changes.

Jim Finley: That's right. That's why I think in AA they say, "making a fearless inventory of our past life." And that raises a question of what's a fearful inventory. A fearful inventory is, "I already know enough bad things about myself, I don't know what else is back there."

Kirsten Oates: Oh, yeah.

Jim Finley: Why? Why are we afraid of it? We believe it has the authority to name who we are, but when we know that the higher power has no authority to name who we are in the eyes of... Then bring it on, you know? I'm God's fool here, just trying to get through another day. You know what I mean? Just like you, we're all in this together. So there's kind of a freedom of humble self-acceptance while we consciously work on these things as best we can, but in a pace that's not dependent on the success that we can reach this and this and... Like the thorn in the flesh for St. Paul, and God says, "Leave it there" The thorn is your teacher. And, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: I did want to talk about practice. You talked about practice a couple of times in the last session, and I wanted to bring back the verse you quoted from Philippians about kenosis.

Jim Finley: Yes. He did not consider his equality with God a condition to be clung to.

Kirsten Oates: And just wondered how you relate that to how we might practice this path.

Jim Finley: Yes. What I was referring to is, and I mentioned Mirabai Starr and I were talking about this, too... See the way the translation of the poem begins, the Ascent of Mount Carmel, or when we began our work on the Active Night. In stanza five of that poem, The Ascent of Mount Carmel, he says, "O guiding night! O night more lovely than the dawn! O night that has united the Lover with his Beloved, transforming the Beloved in her Lover."

Jim Finley: So the beloved is the soul. Her lover is the infinite love of God. And so we're transformed by our infinite... Our soul is transformed by our infinite lover into the very love of God transforming us into itself. And that's most theologically correct. Or put it this way, because it honors the utter transcendence of God. We're transformed through love into God, through love, and are nothingness without God.

Jim Finley: So what I was suggesting in the talk is, and this comes through in John of the Cross with the canticle and the living play. If Christ did not consider his equality with God a condition to be clung to, could we say, then, in the kenosis of God through love, that the soul and God are transformed into each other? That as God does not consider his equality with God, but meets us in mystical love, transforming ourselves into each other. See? As this ultimate kenosis of God's self-donating love, like the ecstasy of God.

Jim Finley: God created you to have someone that he or she can completely give himself to forever, holding nothing back. You just want to empty... So that you in being so taken by that might be so moved that you, then, give your very self to this infinite love that's giving itself to you, and that's heaven. See, that's paradise. And that union occurs obscurely on this earth, and this is this obscure poetry. But in glory, it'll be fully manifested forever. See, it's God's will for us. So this is a foretaste of heaven in the obscurity of love.

Kirsten Oates: And are there practices we can do in our finite experience that might help with that idea? I think the kenosis, you described it as the... of the letting go, letting go.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I use the example of this with myself, with people I work with in therapy. They say someone can be in a marriage or someone with their child, or someone can be teaching students or be committed to the healing of people through medicine or psychology or working with the poor, the disadvantaged, or the commitment to be an artist or to be a poet or to be a solitary. See? And the thing is, you're so moved by the depth of this calling that

you literally spend yourself, or you just give yourself completely to it. And the more you give yourself to it, the more that's given back to you as transformed in it.

Jim Finley: This always implies at a secondary level that you're modulating yourself in terms of sleep and food because you're just a human being. But in your heart, it's like a lifetime of self-giving that over the years has so enriched you, you can hardly begin to put words to it. And I think that's an echo of this self-emptying love, incarnate and lived out with each other and with the Earth.

Kirsten Oates: So in a way, whatever the thing is that enlivens that flow of love, joy, compassion in you, we can let go of things that might get in the way of us entering into that flow, that love, that giving more of ourselves.

Jim Finley: That's right. Because I also think if you look at it this way, that self-giving generosity, in reality, is always kind of messy.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: You know, you're exhausted at the end of the day. There's a lot of things that didn't go right. There's a lot of setbacks. There's misunderstandings. So it's a messy sifting and a give and take, and you go with the flow, you lean into it. You set back again. In AA, like, "life on life's terms."

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: See? It's fully incarnate, but you realize that somehow God's the infinity of that transformative process itself. And the very process itself is the immediacy of God. And you have that heart... a certitude in your heart that it's true.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's really helpful to hear. So even when you find that thing that really draws you towards itself through a love experience, you know, the difficulties, the fatigue, the judgments, all those things are going to be sifted out along the way.

Jim Finley: All that, yeah. Exactly, because if you're going along and the beloved dies, you're diagnosed with cancer, or one of your children gets sick, you don't handle it with mystical serenity.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: You fall apart. But you fall apart with an underlying trust that God's sustaining you as you fall apart. And if you die from it, God's sustaining you as you die. There's an underlying... That's why I say God's a presence that protects us from nothing, even as God sustains us in all things. And even that certitude can go away. You can be a dark night where you momentarily lose the ability to know that.

Jim Finley: But if you have been at it for a while, you know you're just having an episode, if you just wait it, it'll always resurface again. And God's the infinity at the perceived absence of God. So even the absence is trustworthy. You know, it's that kind of thing, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yeah. Lastly, on practice, you suggested that we might notice in the podcast or when

we're reading these mystics, the line that might silence us. And I wondered, after we find the word or the phrase that silences us and we read it and we feel the stillness in the silence, can we then use that idea you just gave us of the letting go? So can that be a part of what we orient to to extend the silent moment or to hold it deeper in our hearts?

Jim Finley: Yes, I think so. I put it this way. Let's say two people deeply in love with each other are having a loving, intimate conversation that brings us to a moment of... It brings them to a silence. We might say the silence is that apophatic part of the love, like the unspeakable or hidden part. When they're moved by love to speak again, the love doesn't break the silence, but it's the cataphatic, manifested love. And so the manifested and the unmanifested are in a constant interplay with each other, if that makes sense in a way. And so it's the same in... So we're reading something or are so moved by it, we stop. And then we rest in it, unexplainably, unexplainably resting in the depths of the unexplainable.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Taking us to it. So, like that. But then when we read it, when we pick up and read again, we read it in a way that doesn't break that communion, but it's the power of the Logos, like the love language, so the cadence and rhythms of the words carry you along, until the next time that you stop.

Jim Finley: And so there's that interplay of the word and the silence, the word and the silence. And then there's another kind of word that does break it, where you realize you step in with your opinion, you step in. But you realize, although you broke it from your end, God never breaks it from God's end. And so you just acknowledge that happened. You're an infinitely loved broken person, and you surrender yourself over that and you read on.

Jim Finley: And that starts. And so the rhythm of that is practice. Then you're practicing what you're trying to have go on throughout the whole day and see that everything's always like that really, these rhythms. And you're trying to be habitually aware of that, so you can eventually share it with others.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful. Back to the marriage example, because I could easily see, you have the moment, something said, or my husband and I love to give each other cards on birthdays and once we've read the card, you feel the depth of the moment. And then, I'll just say for me, sometimes a thought pops into my head, like, "Where are we going for dinner tonight?" Or, "Have you done that? Did you get to take the trash out before we sat down to do this?" And so Jim, would they be the kind of things we might want to just not pay attention to or let go of in the moment to keep the flow of the love going?

Jim Finley: No. See, I don't think so. First of all, let's say you say, "Did you take the trash out?" Okay. Let's say you go another step further and say, "You didn't take the trash out." And you're shaking the card at him that he just gave you, and, "You didn't take out the trash, and you expect me to." I think you just slipped and fell off the edge. But to know that, "Did you take the trash out," and he might say, "No, I didn't. I'm sorry, I'll take it out now," that is the way.

Jim Finley: Martin once said, "The great thing about marriage, it helps people to be sanely carnal, that somehow it's made of thousands of infinitely, ordinary, woven moments with each other, and the patterns." And somehow you begin to realize, "See God so loved the world he sent his

only begotten son.” God so loved the world is sent as the variations and fluctuations of each relational thing that goes deeper, deeper, deeper, whether it’s in solitude or poetry or teaching or a sickness, whatever it is. These are all modalities of being transformed in love, I think.

Kirsten Oates: So that it flows through every aspect of the conversation, even the mundane.

Jim Finley: And by the way, another big thing, I think, having done a lot of marriage counseling too, a lot of people aren’t blessed with a deeply blissful marriage. If they’re a contemplative person, who’s contemplatively sensitive that there’s issues of this marriage that needs to be looked at very seriously with an uncertain outcome. So how do they be mystically present to that? Likewise, there’s some people who keeps slipping into hurtful behavior through anger, withholding, addiction. And a lot of their path is trusting in God’s love for them.

Jim Finley: St. Benedict was asked, “What do you monks do in the monastery all day?” He said, “Fall down and get up, fall down and get up, fall down and get up.” But somehow their path is never giving up on themselves, because God doesn’t. And somehow their path is to be an habitually broken person, and they’ll probably die broken, but if they can die like a broken person, handing themselves over to the God that loves them in their brokenness as their path. So this is always unique to each of us and who we are. And that’s what matters. Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Hal’s going to be thrilled that I now have permission to ask him about the trash as often as I like.

Jim Finley: And if he has objections, you can quote me.

Kirsten Oates: No complaints from me there.

Jim Finley: Oh no, no. No. But to be fair, I’d have to have a talk with him, and he’d give me something about you, because it’s tit for tat. It works both ways.

Kirsten Oates: I’ll make sure to ask him before our Q and A session.

Jim Finley: Yeah, because he might say, “I know it’s not good I don’t take out the trash, but quite seriously, I do think it’s a little more seriously hurtful that you keep pointing it out to me in that tone of voice. Let’s measure the depth of our woundedness here, and think it over while I take out the trash.”

Kirsten Oates: And that’s the way it plays out, right, Jim, just in those very mundane, yeah.

Jim Finley: It does. That’s the beauty. It shines out. It shines out as exquisite, actually, I think, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: And I’m just going to think Hal for the taking out the trash in the loving way he does. Well, I just wanted to, before we close this session, we’ve come to the end of our season three on John of the Cross, and I just wanted to take a pause and ask you, how’s it been for you doing this season John of the Cross, some on your beloved mystic?

Jim Finley: Hear that noise outside my window? Can you hear that-

Kirsten Oates: No.

Jim Finley: ... machine, that leaf blower?

Kirsten Oates: Oh, that started?

Jim Finley: Oh, that's good, you can't hear it. Okay, good. I tell you what this has been for me. This whole series is so providential for me. When I went to the monastery right out of high school, and with Merton's help, I was immersed in these mystics. They had such a profound effect on me. And then when I left, I continued to immerse myself in them, and then later give retreats on them.

Jim Finley: So for me to be sharing these people that have guided me over the years, these classical texts and the beauty and truth of it. So it's a variation of me doing silent contemplative retreats, how to live a contemplative life in the midst of the world. And the meals are in silence and there's sittings, and then I share talks like this. So I see the podcast is like a monastery without walls that allows me to pass on these teachings that have so transformed my life, really. So I felt very good about it. I just feel it's a blessing to me.

Kirsten Oates: It's been a real gift. And Jim, have you enjoyed being back in the works of John of the Cross in a more dedicated fashion as this?

Jim Finley: I did. This morning, I took five hours preparing for this talk today-

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: ... by outlining it all over again. I outlined it by hand and went through it, read the passages again, and found other passages and sat with it. Every time I get reimmersed in it, I get reawakened to how beautiful it is. You know what I mean? It's just stunning, actually. And what a gift to be drawn to it, because even to be drawn to it, bears witness that you're already on the path, or wouldn't be drawn to it. And so we each are where we are. And so what a gift that we can all be together like this, on this path, following these teachers. Yeah. It's a gift.

Kirsten Oates: So, Jim, we're not quite at the end of the season because next time we'll be reflecting on some questions that have been sent in by people listening. So I'm looking forward to that. So I think we've had quite a number of questions come in. So we can look forward to that.

Jim Finley: Good. I like that. I like that. We'll look forward to that. Very good.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you. Okay. Well, I'll see you back here for that. Thank you, Jim.

Jim Finley: You're welcome. And thank you, Corey, also, both of you.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for listening to this episode of Turning to the Mystics, a podcast created by the Center for Action and Contemplation. We're planning to do episodes that answer your questions. So if you have a question, please email us at podcasts@cac.org, or send us a voicemail at cac.org/voicemails. All of this information can be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.