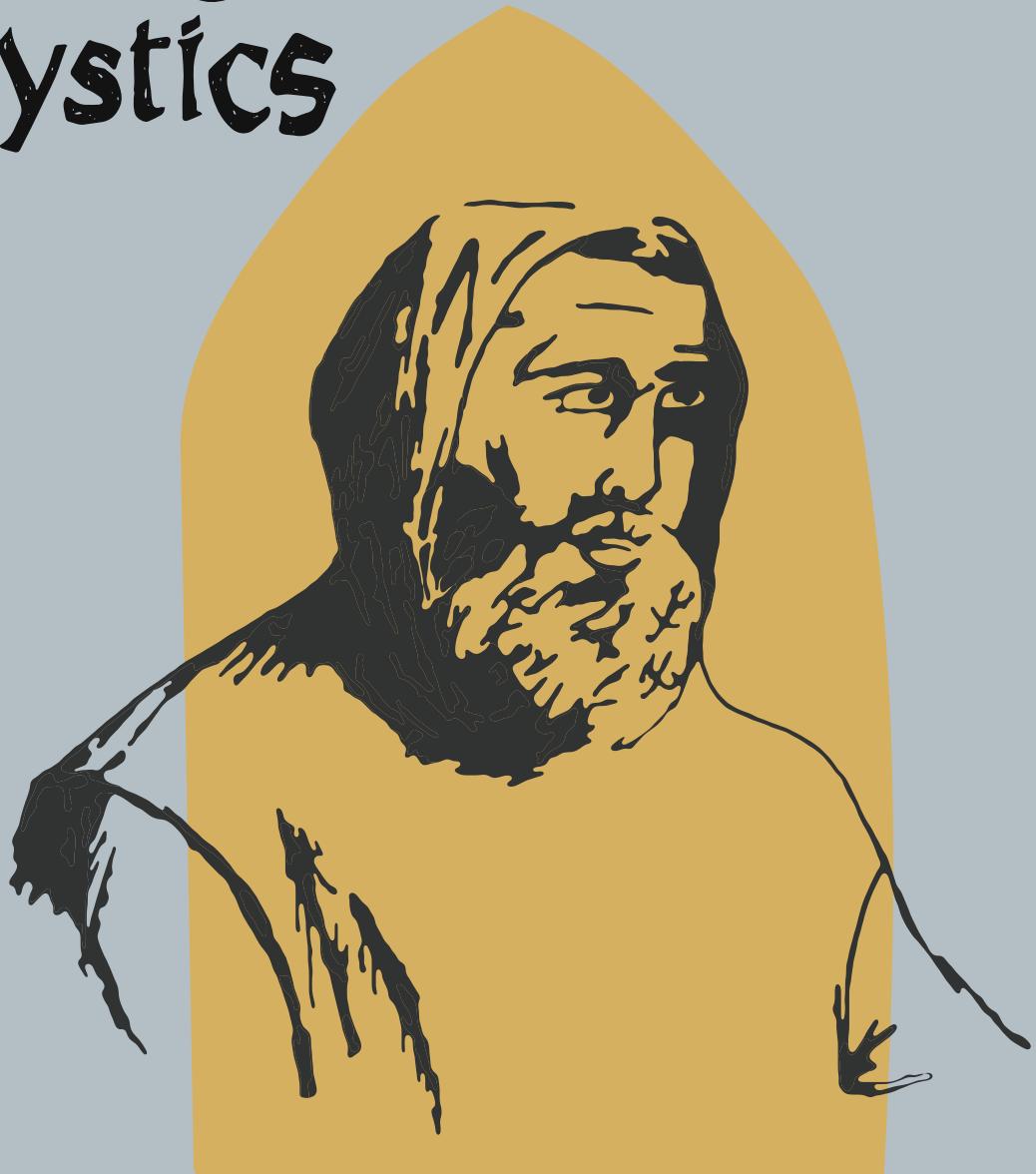


Turning to the Mystics



Guigo 11

Dialogue 3
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, everyone, to the Season 4 dialogue, where I'm here with Jim. Hi, Jim.

Jim Finley: Hi.

Kirsten Oates: To talk about Guigo, the second book, The Ladder of Monks, and your third talk on the ladder. And, Jim, in this session, you focused on the fourth rung of the ladder. And my first question about the fourth rung, is there anything we actually do at that rung? Or is what happens at that rung all done by God?

Jim Finley: I would say this, it's subtle. So, that earlier session, I said there is a contemplative dimension to each of the rung. So, for example, in the lectio, as we take in the beauty of the word heard, we're drawn to contemplate that beauty, for example. And so, the act of choosing to contemplate it is an act on our part, it's participatory. Same with meditation, we pause to Kant on prayer. What distinguishes contemplation for Guigo, which means by infused contemplation, is it is purely an act of God.

Jim Finley: That is, because what happens in the longing is that your finite longings for this infinite oneness, being finite, we can't do it. And therefore, the boundary crossing is God crosses over. And God infinitely gives the infinity of God to us in our powerlessness to reach it, and that's the power of it. And then, what we do is we experience it. We're caught up in it, or we're amazed by it, or we're in unexplainable oneness with God's unexplainable oneness with us, like that.

Jim Finley: So, we're talking about it as an event. And the different ways to discern that event is happening to us because sometimes it's extremely subtle. But what that leads to then is when that moment passes the path, then the light that shines out from that event illuminates the path, and that's what we're exploring. Then, lastly, what is this path of an ever more habitual groundedness in the oneness, fleetingly realized and that's path talk, I think.

Kirsten Oates: So, in terms of Guigo's method, there's only activity on our side on the first three rungs.

Jim Finley: Yes. There's only our activity, but the activity is always a response to God's activity. But the activity of God on the first three rungs is mediated or incarnate in and as our faith, in and as our consolation, in and as our insight and so on. So, there's mediations of God and we're actively experiencing that and actively engaging in it. We're choosing to engage in and commit our life to it. We're in the essence of the contemplative, which is really a foretaste of heaven.

Jim Finley: See, it's really God acting in us, an infinity of God as God in an unexplainable oneness. And then, when it dissipates, we're left with the longing to abide in that and that's where you picks up with the path or what's that? If there is the path of the ladder that led up to the oneness and then there is the taste of oneness, then what is the path that's illumined by the moment of oneness realized? What does it mean to be someone who lives like that?

Kirsten Oates: Yes. And you said it's the case that contemplatio that you called it catching fire, where God unites with us, can happen at any of the rungs.

Jim Finley: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. In other words, the fire happens at any of the rungs at the level at which is experienced at that rung. So, for example, in the lectio, it can catch fire but it catches fire as being intimately moved by the beauty of God personally speaking that to us.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: God personally communicating to us in a discursive, in our peripheral dialogue with God. It catches fire in that sense. But with contemplation, it catches fire with the fire of God, that is an infinite fire-

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: ... that takes us into itself like glory. It's a foretaste of glory, just like God in all directions and who we are in God. And then, when it passes, then we're left with wow, holy cow. And then, we know having tasted it, now we know it's real. We know it's true. And it left in our heart the trace of a longing to abide in it. It was very careful to leave. Because having tasted it, we know the poverty or the incompleteness of that which is outside that all pervasive oneness intimately realized and that's the path. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: The big point of this book and why you are teaching us about the mystics is because even though it's a massive event in our life, sometimes it's even hard to recognize what had happened. Is that right?

Jim Finley: Yeah. The interiority of life is infinitely bigger than the exteriority. I mean, exterior life is mystic universe, the cosmos, and our plans and projects. And the world is very, very big, but it's saying that the interiority is infinitely bigger than the exteriority because it's this destiny for infinite oneness with the infinite, infinite that shine. But the exterior self that was transcended in the moment, when the oneness passes, we know not what to make of it because then we're back to a Lectio Divina that's been touched by the mystical.

Jim Finley: And so, we're like in the aura of it. But insofar as we're still trying to get to it again to the exteriority, we're back in this very mysterious, later in the text, we'd have Jacob wrestling with the angel, that somehow we're in this very subtle and it's so delicate that it's so hard to even begin to find words to speak of it because of its interiority like that.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Would you also say, Jim, that because it happens on God's terms, it's counterintuitive to the ego in a certain way? Because the ego wants to have a sense of control and so it's hard for the ego to give up terms to God even.

Jim Finley: I would say this, another way of looking at it would be this. Let's say we could speak first of the unawakened ego. And so, the unawakened ego is our reflective consciousness or human experience. But we're somehow exiled from God's all encompassing, self-donating presence, that is our very presence and our nothingness without God. And therefore, what we're used to is our finite experience of the finiteness of ourself.

Jim Finley: In the passage of time, in the circumstance where I spilled the coffee and I'm late for the

meeting, and I want to have lunch. I have to say this to so and so. All that's real. And because there's a rumor attached to it, because it gives a semblance of control, because it's a familiarity, we know our way around the closed horizon at the finite. So, then, when we're touched by the infinite, it's counterintuitive because it means the ego and being so transcended has to yield over its claim and having the final say in who we are.

Jim Finley: But we know to give into it, it's based on fear. The ego has our time believing, it can be vulnerable and safe at the same time. And so, how do we gently learn this love that instills this trust of being surrendered over to the unexplainable that's taking us to itself unexplainably in our heart, and that's the subtlety. It's the delicacy of it.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yeah, it's interesting when you talk about that story of Jacob because it's trying to show that delicacy in a very big way. But ultimately, what that's showing and describing is happening inside in a very subtle ways. Is that right?

Jim Finley: Yes. Another way we were saying in an earlier session too is that, this is then incarnate in married love, or it's incarnate in parent and child, or it's incarnate with one's grandmother or grandfather, or incarnate with the way of the artist, the way of the poet. That is to say that there's the welling up of a gift, which can only carry you away into the richness of itself and your willingness to surrender to it.

Jim Finley: So, in the surrender, then you can tell when the person is speaking out of the surrender, which is the eloquence of the poetic. Do I mean it's the eloquence of the aesthetically beautiful? But as long as the person tries to stay in this side of it, it's crafts, it's a replication of a certain craft that you can replicate it. And so, this mystery we're talking about is somehow built right into life itself because they were touched by something.

Jim Finley: What will become of me if I surrender to this? But what will become of me if I don't, that the price paid for the half-lived life is bitter when tasting it? Yet, there's that immediate afraid to surrender because it's internalized traumas and abandonments and fears. And so, it's a conversion process, I think, with God's help and with love's help, and we find our way.

Kirsten Oates: So, these tastes we get in marriage or as parents or in our work or in our artistry, are they the contemplatio? Is that what Guigo is referring to as a contemplatio? Is it just pointing to that?

Jim Finley: I would say this, I would say that in daily life, these incarnations in marriage and parenting and solitude and nature and so on, I would say they're foreshadowings or intimation of the contemplatio. You know what I mean? Like, the alluring hint of a shining like with the experience with the beloved, or the child, whatever is translucent to the divine. Then, we can use it.

Jim Finley: But once the enlightenment has occurred, once the oneness has occurred, then we're able to recognize the fullness of God's infinite presence in the ordinariness of the beloved's presence, the ordinariness of the child's presence, and the ordinariness of our presence and I think that's the difference.

Kirsten Oates: I see. Is what you're saying that just like the lectio, the prayer and the meditatio can catch fire in a certain way? Once the contemplatio happened, we experience all three of those differently. It's the same as a parent or a spouse at any moment, that contemplatio moment might happen and then I might experience being a parent or being a spouse differently?

Jim Finley: Yeah, yes. I think this is what Guigo means when we reflected on the passage, where he says that when the moment of oneness passes, we're not to plummet out of the richness of the moment, like a freefall and that nothingness. All of that can happen. We can experience it that way. But I use this image of falling backwards in slow motion. So, we fall out of the oneness. I say, but we fall into what? We fall into the lectio.

Jim Finley: We're just sitting there in our living room with the Scriptures open, whatever. But then, it's different because now we know at any moment, the simplicity or devotional sincerity of the lectio can catch fire. And even deeper, we know in our heart that the very ordinariness of the sincerity of our lectio is the fire of God, incarnate as the ordinariness of our simplicity sitting there. See, I think that's the habituated mystical state really when we sense that.

Kirsten Oates: I listened to a singer be interviewed over the weekend and she said, "It's so funny, I'm nowhere near as wise as my songs. I'm just not as wise as my songs. And sometimes, I say things in my songs that I would never, never say out loud." So, she'd had family members listen to the song to share what was on her heart. And she said, "We could never have that conversation, but they could listen to my song and cry, and I could write the song and cry. And in a way, the fact that we both done that was a healing experience."

Jim Finley: Yeah. See, that's why I think the poet, when they're in the stream of this, it isn't just that we're surprised by the beauty of it, but the poet was also surprised because it was the qualitative richness of it is a gift that float through their willingness to be receptively open to the flow. It's really the creative act, participating in the creativity of God really. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: This reminds me, I think it was in the introduction when we talked about Guigo's hidden life and how that was relevant. And you talked about this idea of the hiddenness of God and that we can experience things arising from the hiddenness of God. Am I getting close to what the poet experiences and what the-

Jim Finley: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That sit with a person or whatever. Let's say yes that Guigo, like Thomas Merton or Teresa of Avila or Julian and her hermitage, they recall this very unusual vocation to physics to solitude as a deep communion with God and communion with the whole world, like the hidden ministry, this fidelity that touches the world like that. But 99.999% of us don't live and close to solidarity. We live in the world. But there's a lot of aloneness in the world.

Jim Finley: I mean, there are people who live alone, people who are widowed. There's aloneness. But what we're saying here, there's another kind of aloneness, solitude and it's this, is

that as I walk this path or as I seek to be faithful to the stirrings of my desire to be ever more in this, there's something that the closer I get to it, the more and more hidden it becomes. Or put it another way, the me to whom this is most immediately given is hidden from me. It's reflected out or I'm aware of the aura of it.

Jim Finley: But the aura is outflowing of an innermost oneness that's hidden, and I think that's the difference. On this earth, it's that way. So, it's real and deep, it's subtle and obscure. I look on her as an obscure clarity. But it's a foreshadowing of glory when we passed the veil of death, all of us as the infinite openness. So, it's a very infinite openness, that celestial openness, that is already secretly present in us secretly. And we're called to live that way in the world to be present to the world.

Jim Finley: And then, that heightens our sensitivity of then seeing this in everybody, which then becomes the imperative of social justice or compassion or mercy or sensitivity like that.

Kirsten Oates: I think in the introduction, you talked about how we could even focus on our breath and be asking the questions, where does it come from a hidden place? And I just wanted to ask, because if I was to ask a doctor, they might tell me it comes from the lungs doing this and the heart doing that. So, how can we use the breath getting us to the sense of hiddenness?

Jim Finley: Yeah. Let's say, first of all, that the physician would say that and the physician would be correct about the diaphragm and the circuits of the brain that control the breath, the autonomic nervous system and all of that's true. It's the anatomy and physiology and science, and then the medicine that deals with the treatment of disorders and that. But I think I use this image, I can't remember. This longtime friend of mine I went to the doctoral program with, I just talked to him on the phone yesterday.

Jim Finley: Is that when their first child was born, his wife, for the first time after delivering the baby, went out alone to go shopping. And so, he was alone with his newborn infant. And he was lying on the sofa and she was on his chest and she was asleep. And her mouth was up against his ear, and she was breathing, and he started crying. See, that's not physiology. He said, "Well, of course, her tiny little diaphragm is doing this and this and this. What's wrong with me reaching for a Kleenex like geez? Just get over it."

Jim Finley: Because it's the immediacy of the emergence of manifested presence from once is it arise, and it's God. See, God breathed into Adam the gift of life. And so, God's breathing into in a self-donating act, God's exhaling God, and giving out which we receive in our inhalation, and we can be touched by that. And by the way, so meditative practices that focus on the breathing are to help us liberate ourselves from being so bound up in reflections and thoughts to be in the primordial simplicity of the breath.

Jim Finley: And then, the breath has depth dimension to it, so it can become the doorway into this real life state. And later on, we look at the Cloud of Unknowing. We'll see that too and the use of the word or in the Jesus Prayer, the use of a word. It just grounds that he says, "Where you take everything you know and you bury it in this one little word and stay there." And really, these are strategies that invite the state, this awakened unit of state, all these mystics are trying to help us with.

Kirsten Oates: And that state is that deep interior place you were just talking about that's connected to

God, that's already one with God.

Jim Finley: Already one with God. And then, when we see that really it isn't in the state that more was given to us but we fleetingly glimpse what is the infinite mystery of every moment of our life. Just the sun moving across the sky is this, the slanted light across the floor, watering the house plants, getting up out of a chair. Everything is unexplainably, the manifestation or the manifested presence of God, which is Christ consciousness, which is God consciousness. Turning to The Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: You talked a lot about longings and longings being an important part of the path once you've had the experience. So, I'm just wondering for people listening to the podcast, myself included, I have a deep longing to pursue what you're talking about. When you speak of it, I longed for it in my heart to experience it. Does that mean I've experienced it and I'm in the path of longing and I might not have realized? Or is it I've had tastes of it and it's drawing me towards itself? What would you say to a beginner who has this deep longing?

Jim Finley: Yeah, this is an important thing I think, really. Let's say, we could go to spiritual direction. So, one of these mystics say we go and we're so excited. It isn't as if Guigo is listening and then would say to us as gently as possible, "I don't think you're cut off for this. You're so far away from it. You don't even know how far away you are." They wouldn't say that, but what they would do is meet you in the sincerity of the very question that you're asking because it's never other than the intimate immediacy of that. That's the thing.

Jim Finley: That's why I use this image of where Laozi says in the Tao Te Ching, the Tao like rains down and the water seeks the lowest place nurturing all that lives. So, it's never anything other than the sincerity of your desire to be stabilized in it. And in some mysterious way, the infinite fullness of God is fully present in the simplicity of that sincerity.

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: I think it's why we're so moved by the presence of children. We consensus in them. See, there's a plenitude that shines out from their charmed ineptness to articulate, and I think it's how God sees us in God's presence. And so, if we just stay there with this sincerity and then keep leaning into it and see where it takes you because otherwise, we get this weird notion that there's this thing called mystical union.

Jim Finley: That's why I use that image in the previous talk too, where we imagine when we hear talk like this, like a high jumper trying to jump over a high bar and we try and try. And just as we exhaust ourselves, God steps out, takes the bar and puts it flat on the ground. Approaching the bar, bewildered by the simplicity of the task we trip over and fall into God's hand, and that's really what it's like. And I would even say this, I would say to the very fact I use that image and you laughed, I said, God see infinity of your laughter.

Jim Finley: See, it's a surprising nearness of what we're looking for. So, right here, it's like that I think, seriously.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. And that it takes me by... it's surprising. It's a surprising end of the story when you say the bar gets lowered. It's not what I had in mind. It's like suddenly, you can do the jump.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Even though it surprises us, the story surprises us, even though we experience it over and over again, we're turning to see a flock of birds descending, or the face of the beloved, or waking up in the middle of the night, it's raining. We experienced this over and over again. I get washes over but it's so sublime and none impositively pervasively present because we walk right past it.

Jim Finley: So, we're trying to slow way down, they become habituated to that sensitivity or that sensibility to this all pervasive subtlety, which is God action, being poured out at us the immediacy of taking a sip of tea or whatever.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. So funny, you mentioned little children because I got a video from my sister overnight of my youngest niece, Gigi. She's three and she's reading a book about a little bird who jumps out of the nest and gets lost. And she's reading with a very loud, confident voice, so cute. And she says, every time she turns the page, and the bird says, "Where is my mother?"

Gigi: Are you my mother? No, I'm a chicken.

Kirsten Oates: And it's so sweet.

Jim Finley: Yeah, they're so unself-aware of how disarmingly charming they are. I think that's God, really. Also, I was with my youngest daughter and her youngest daughter at the time was, I don't remember, we play cards later that evening or something. And her daughter was, I don't know, maybe six. I don't know how old she was. And they got McDonald's for the children. And they were going to go to bed, but they knew pizza was going to be delivered.

Jim Finley: Later, we were going to order a pizza. The adults say, "We're going to play this game." And so, my daughter said to her mother, my daughter, "Mom, can we please stay up? Please?" And she looked over at me and she says, "Please, I never got to see an old person eat pizza before." That's really something. Please, please. Sorry. Anyway, okay.

Kirsten Oates: Well, when you are talking about the longing and the children, it made me think Gigi. Are you my mother? That we're walking around saying, "Are you God? Where are you God?"

Jim Finley: Yes, that's really true. That's really true. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. So, that longing, Jim, can you help me just to understand? So, I feel the longing and so I take it to this kind of a practice. I commit to a daily time to bring this longing to God. Is that part of how we enter the path and start to calibrate ourselves?

Jim Finley: Yes. Here's a way of putting it. There's this Christian teacher, Bernard Lonergan, who's very difficult metaphysician on epistemology, and Mary Frohlich did a lovely book on Teresa of Avila, *The Intersubjectivity of the Mystic* on that. But I want to take one insight from that as applied to this. Let's say that longing or longing is desire and the desire is the desire for the good. That is to say, the will longs for the good and it longs for the fulfillment of goodness, which is love.

Jim Finley: And that's a transcendental quality of our very being to long. And it gets distorted in different ways when we lose it and all of that. Then, the next level is where the longing is illumined by faith. That is, we realized that the longing is that we're living in relationship

with a mystery greater than ourself. And that mystery greater than ourself is in relationship with us. And so, we might experience it as the good, we might experience it as love, we might experience it as the beautiful, we might experience it as fidelity.

Jim Finley: So, these are these modalities that manifested presencing of this mystery of life, an intentional consciousness illumine by faith. If we would say Christ then as the mentor or the exemplar of this. But then, what the mystics say is what can happen in the gift and beauty of that living that way? What can happen in the midst of this is that we're given a taste of something more, not more of this, that is not more of the grace of the illumine awareness of the goodness of life and how we live it, but the taste of that which is infinitely more than more.

Jim Finley: And that taste is this contemplative experience. Then, when the moment passes, having fleetingly entered heaven, we're fleetingly tasted that, which is infinitely more than more. Then, we're left with the desire to abide in what's infinitely more than more and is itself the reality of the very least aspects of everything, the tree, the flower, the stone, whatever. And that longing then is an echo of God's infinite longing for us.

Jim Finley: When God creates us as the beloved, God creates us, God longs for someone who longs for God. For in the reciprocity of the longing, destiny is fulfilled. And so, we're talking about gratations of that. So, even the very least, the child's longing for the mother, are you my mother, whatever, all these are echoes, reverberations of this infinite, this divine longing, being echoed back to God, created by God and moving even more and more toward this. That's one way I see it poetically.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. And you said that Guigo is trying to help us cooperate with that.

Jim Finley: Yes. And cooperate with it not just by talking about it like this, which is helpful because he used poetic insights. But how experientially realize it in the simplicity of the Lectio. Thomas Merton once said in a talk, he said, "It isn't like you're sitting before the fireplace sipping a glass of sherry underlying passages in St. John of the Cross." Well, this is great, but you'd never close the book. You have a whole library of underlying mystical works, but you never leave words behind.

Jim Finley: You never sit in this disarming simplicity of the immediacy of it all and let it have its way with you as it's given to you to do so.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, you talked about this way we can get so disheartened so that we have the longing and we're doing our practice or we're trying to see God in everything the way you're describing, and we can get disheartened. But you said that the master is one who really doesn't get disheartened in the way we do. Can you unpack that a little bit more?

Jim Finley: Yes, yes. So, let's say I'm going to speak now as a therapist also. See, another question that's raised is, it isn't just that you long for this, which the mystic speak, which is good. But what's going on with you that your ability to realize fulfillment in the ways that you're able to, it's not enough for you. Who you're at with that? You got out of bed this morning. Not everybody did. They went to bed last night with big plans. They died in their sleep.

Jim Finley: You put your feet on the floor. Not everybody did. Some people don't have feet. You walked

out into the kitchen. So, where are you at and being grateful for and nourished by what you are experiencing? What's in the way of that? Because if we could, together, find a way to be more nourished by what is there, you will see that the echoes of God are present in that and then see how that might grow and deepen as you're graced to do so.

Jim Finley: So, the example I gave about limping, about frailty is the example I use is that, we said that the... I refer you to Thomas Merton because I lived with him. He had a temper and we'd have these big fights with the abbot. I had different things going on with him. And so, what you'd realize when you know them and you live with them, you can see yes, they're authentic. They really are this, and Merton was that. The human being that he was, his foibles and personality traits and givens, I mean, he wrote lots of books, but I don't think he had a choice.

Jim Finley: I think he was driven. He was a contemplatively, grounded driven person. He couldn't stop banging away on the typewriter and he knew that about him. He had other things. But here's the thing, we're saying that the mystic who is just himself or herself, just like all of us are, they're aware of their foibles, their idiosyncratic foibles and things, but they're not handicapped by it because they know there are just limitations.

Jim Finley: Why be limited by limitations? Since God's infinitely in love with me in the midst of my limitations, it doesn't mean I don't need to keep working on my limitations. Insofar as I know they hurt me and they hurt other people, that's immoral imperative. But my peace isn't dependent on the extent to which I can overcome them, which is really placing the ego before God. Can I overcome this? Can I overcome this? Can I overcome that?

Jim Finley: Rather, it's realizing you're being overcome by God's infinite love for you and your inability to overcome. And so, that's why they're not handicapped and limping. They run free in the deep acceptance of their brokenness like this. And then, they also know the same is true of you, but you wouldn't believe them if they told you that because you're so convinced of the authority of your limitations. I got to get there. Or even the authority, I don't know if I'll ever reach mystical union.

Jim Finley: They can't talk you out of that. Mystics don't argue. They join you in your concerns. They walk with you and wow, gee, I can tell this is hard for you. But you notice something, I think what really matters, it isn't just you're longing for something you don't think you realize was more significant as you longed for it. You're touched by it because you recognize it. And we only recognize what in some way we already know.

Jim Finley: Because if you didn't already know it, you wouldn't be drawn to it. And I think that would be a good way to start. See, I think that's where the mystics go. They go to the sincerity of the longing is itself what we're looking for. But we have to be very patient and open, and you need to be attentive to that dimension of things, if that makes sense.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, that balance of working on yourself and working to be more connected to God and a more loving person. But the balance of knowing you're already fully loved just as you are, even as you're working on noticing and working on things.

Jim Finley: That's right. That's why I think too, say a grandparent or spouse or a loved one who's dying and they're very childlike, in a way. It's amazing how the circle repeats itself. And as you're

with them, present with them in their deepening limitations, they become all the more disarmingly beautiful to you with the presence that's shining out to the limitations, that are actually powerless to, in any way, limit how unexplainably precious they are.

Jim Finley: That's why I think this, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross on the stages of dying, acceptance is the gate of heaven, that the person in an acceptance is dying a mystic. It's like free from the tyranny of death and the midst of death. So, now, we're saying, wouldn't it be great not to wait to the last minute to become that? Wouldn't it be good to start now knowing how disarmingly precious you are in the intimate immediacy of the patterns of the day like that? Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, that's beautiful. So, accepting ourselves and our circumstances in God, while still working on the things that cause suffering or disconnection.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And I think that's what Jesus meant, this is so much at the heart of the gospel, really. So, where Jesus says you have eyes to see, but you don't see. That is, there's your God-given capacity to see the God-given godly nature of each passing moment of your life and you don't see it. And this is a source of all your sorrow, this is a source of all your confusion. And so, this quickening of awareness through love, this light shining through is something so unexplainably present all along we didn't recognize it.

Jim Finley: And we can get acclimated to that hidden light and learn to work in that register or that realm. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. And I want to revisit the practice you offered us earlier, which is to just be more attentive to our own lives and where this might be arising in the simplicity or the pain or the love that we're experiencing.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Some of this occurred to me sometimes if I talk to people, they'll say they meditate and have a racing mind. And by the way, there's some people for different reasons, hyperactive things, different things can be going on with people, and that they're better off with lectio or reflective prayer rather than wordless prayer and so on. So, a way to look at it, let's say you're sitting there with your racing mind.

Jim Finley: The idea isn't to try to stop your racing mind, it's to join God and being infinitely in love with you in the midst of your racing mind. You might even talk to your racing mind, where are you headed to so fast? Are you trying to find something? I'm trying to understand you better. Or are you running from something? How can I move alongside of my racing mind? Or if I'm sitting in meditation, I'm confused, I don't know what was going.

Jim Finley: Instead of being upset by it and try not be confused, to know and trust it, as confused as you are that God's never confused and God's crystal clear of how infinitely lovable you are in God's eyes. And so, your confusion deeply accepted as humility, and humility is homecoming. You know what I mean? That's that shift that we stood up-

Kirsten Oates: What about emotions like regret or guilt or those kind of emotions, and we have done something hurtful?

Jim Finley: Yeah. And let's say that's a conscience, we should regret it. And regret, we should do something about it. We need to make amends or work on that or whatever we need to do.

The truth will set you free. But here's the thing, no matter what that is you regret, please notice within yourself attributing to it an authority to name who you are that it doesn't really have, for only God's infinite love you is the authority to name who you are, and that's repentance. That's repentance. And so, that's what we're really trying... that's the thing I think. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: I appreciated in this last talk how you brought out one of the challenging passages and all these mystics from different centuries and different contexts. They have passages like that, didn't they?

Jim Finley: They do. God is a jealous lover. And the angels are secretly watching this and word back, that's what he did now. Really? Just what we were doing so well.

Kirsten Oates: I just felt so loving for my men suddenly.

Jim Finley: I don't know how I bought into this whole thing with this person. Oh, my God, I'm out of here. Regardless, it's a cultural things and all. But I think, really, the image I use, I think, it's really true. It is that the more deeply in love we are with someone and want to move, you are never to intentionally do anything to cause them suffering. And also, we know in their love for us how motivated we are not to do anything that hurts ourself because of their love for us. It hurts them when we see us hurting ourselves and I think that's what he's really saying. It's like that. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, like a conscience.

Jim Finley: Yeah, it was like love infuse.

Kirsten Oates: A God given love.

Jim Finley: Yes, a love infused conscience.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, that's helpful. That's really helpful. I think that's what I found with some of the mystics is just those passages like that, but that was just the language they use.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And there was a cultural thing there, I think, and the spirituality of the time and so on. There were certain things where in a way, they meant exactly what they said. Yeah, this idea that was really, but when you really look at the purity of the mystic as mystic and the truth of the gospel, I think it's clearly more... I was giving a talk once in Finland and Scotland, and someone at the talk said, you know what he said, that Jesus wept but he never said that Jesus laughed.

Jim Finley: And I thought, that's right, he never says that. But I said, "I'm sure that he did." I said, "I'm sure he wasn't a dour or hard to be around person." And I said, "It's not like two disciples standing out on the road talking. And one of them looks up and sees Christ coming towards them." And one disciple says to the other, "Oh, Christ, here comes Christ." It's not possible. You know what I mean? I think he was serious, the very present, but he went to weddings and funerals and walked with people. But it is an interesting observation-

Kirsten Oates: It really is.

Jim Finley: ... that he wept and pleaded. It was a nice insight, but I'm sure he did laugh.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yeah. Last thing, last question for today just reflecting on the point you made that it's hard to find someone to talk to about these things. I mean, it's just hard to talk about them in general, but especially as a beginner who's really longing for something and it's really even hard to articulate. I even find in these dialogues your poetic words and then my questions come crashing into the [inaudible 00:45:34].

Jim Finley: Was that true? I don't experience it that way.

Kirsten Oates: But it's hard to explain the stream you're in when you're talking about these beautiful things. It's hard for me to find words for that stream.

Jim Finley: Let's say something about that. It must be a nice word and not on words. Let's say that we're taken by this. I guess, anyone listening to this series is taken by it that's why they listen to it. And I think anything that were taken by, especially anything that we think is particularly beautiful or important, there's a natural desire to want to share it with somebody. Or also because we know we're subject to a self-deception to find someone who can offer some help or guidance like this.

Jim Finley: And a lot of times, that's not there. Merton told me this once in the monastery, we were having one of these talks about this, and he said, "Once in a while you'll find somebody with whom you can talk about such things." He said, "But they're hard to find." And he said, "That's your solitude." So, I think aloneness or solitude. So, what we do is we talk to God about it, knowing that God's talking with us about it.

Jim Finley: And also, then, we're grateful for the mystics because when we read it and we listen to it, the very fact we recognize the beauty in their words, the deathless presence of the mystic is talking to us. And then, when we engage in meditation and reflection, we're talking with the mystic, talking with God, talking with us, and we carry that within us. I also think as it deepens, we can recognize that this is present in every sincere conversation.

Jim Finley: But the mystical dimension is latent, that if we're just sitting over dinner talking about with each other on what happened that day, and we're able to recognize an innate preciousness about the exchange. If we know this person that we're with isn't tuned into this, we don't say, "Oh, my God, do you realize how mystical this conversation is over the shopping we did this afternoon," because you can tell they look at you funny when you do that.

Jim Finley: And so, you're imposing on them something that's not where they are. But once in a while, what happens is you find somebody and you can tell, and I swear I always thought... I was contemplative to spiritual direction, too. So, sometimes there's one a little further down the path you can sit. And as soon as you're a little more down the path, you help them. As soon as you're just seekers talking with one another, but you can tell like a residence or a mutual recognition.

Jim Finley: So, I think all the people listening to this podcast is a community of people bound together and then share it, so when we have these dialogues, we respond to their questions. If it was possible for all these people up on the screen at once and have them unmute themselves, let's chat. It'd be a great conversation.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, yeah. It would be fabulous.

Jim Finley: And so, always just know that it's there. But with you and I now, it's here. And as you're listening to us, our conversation is going on inside of them, goes on. So, I think that's part of the thing, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Well, it's a joy to be in dialogue with you, Jim, and I'm glad. I hope it's helpful to people listening.

Jim Finley: Me, too. Yeah. Me, too.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Well, I think that's it for today. And we've got a couple of special episodes coming up. But that, we've reached the end of your reflections on Guigo. And wow, what a fabulous season. It's helpful.

Jim Finley: Really? It was wonderful. And I'm so glad we did went to Guigo like this. It's so helpful.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Looking forward to next week. Thank you, Jim.

Jim Finley: Thank you.