



# Turning to the Mystics

## The Cloud of Unknowing

Dialogue 1: The Common Life  
with James Finley and Kirsan Oates

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 season five of Turning To The Mystics where we're turning to an anonymous author and the book The Cloud of Unknowing. I'm here with Jim and we're going to dialog about his first session on the cloud.

Kirsten Oates: Fun to start a new mystic. I'm excited about it. I wanted to begin where you began with that first session, which was going over the schema that this author uses to describe these states of faith or degrees of faith and awakening to God. Just an opening question, does everyone on a faith journey go through, especially the first two stages?

Jim Finley: I would say if we're on a faith journey, first of all, of course, everyone is in or has gone through the first stage, that is there is a kind of religious consciousness but it gives moral guidelines, it gives a sense of belonging, all good things, whatever your own heritage is, continuity, and probably too to sincerely then live your faith, where it's personally important to you and everyone lives a special way.

Jim Finley: Also, in the common way and in the special way, everyone from time to time experiences the blind stirring of love, like the quickening, but not everyone has a singular phase where there's a desire to abide in that stirring, like a longing, having tasted it, one wants to find one's way of how do I stare there? Not everyone has that.

Jim Finley: He's writing for the person who is experiencing that or to help us discern it because it's subtle in a way. It's a very subtle kind of longing and so he's trying to offer guidance in how to recognize it, understand it, and then like all these mystics, how to respond to it, how to yield to it.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I was thinking about parents or grandparents, even me as an aunt, listening to this podcast and thinking about this schema in relation to children, teenagers, people growing up in our midst and so, hopefully, this teaching will be helpful to looking at the next generation and how to better support them in their faith journey.

Jim Finley: Exactly. You know, for years I taught high school religion, I taught seniors, Catholic schools [inaudible 00:03:07] textbooks and it's interesting, these 17, 18 years old, some of them just aren't there but some of them are very ... They have their own sense of their faith and how to grow in it and they're very sincere about it and so that's how we in our own journey can look back and help others move along.

Jim Finley: Also, we're saying for those who have, in this contemplative way, can help people who are just beginning to find their way into it and how to help them, and that's what the author of the Cloud is doing. That's all the mystics are doing. We're all in this together and someone, such and such person, is well seasoned in this, is there to help people find their way into this and that's the teachings really.

Kirsten Oates: I didn't have guidance like this, which is so helpful but my grandmother did really encourage

the mystical sense of life, when I was growing up, which I look back on and see was a great grounding for this journey I'm on now.

Kirsten Oates: You mentioned the desire that comes and we've been seeing with all these mystics how desire is the first step into this contemplative journey and this desire ... Jim, you describe it as like it's a gift, we can't make it come to life ourselves.

Jim Finley: Here's how it helps me to understand it. We do this thing, say we draw a circle, it represents ourselves, our interiority of ourself, our soul. We know by faith that God lives in the inner most hidden center of ourselves, the kingdom of heaven is within you, and so God and the whole universe cannot contain, it's all about us, as Augustine says closer to us than we are to our self.

Jim Finley: What happens in this special way, devotional sincerity, is that God does illumine the interiority of that circle. Not the center but it illumines ... Reflective consciousness illumined by faith, so there's consolations, there's insights, there's aspirations, there's these gifts that come to us that guide us in our faith walk.

Jim Finley: What happens in the stirring, which is a blind stirring in your in most center ... It's hidden. It's that hidden center where you and God are unexplainably one with each other. It stirs there.

Jim Finley: It echos in your reflective consciousness. From without and within it stirs and you're caught in-between this not God has got it ... He says not as God is in us, loving God for his gifts, that we're grateful for God creates us, God loves us, God redeems us, we should be grateful for all of that, so this is not God stirring in us as a gift but we're being stirred by the love of God in God, as God, as her destiny. When we pass through the vale of death and enter into eternity, we'll enter into knowing God with God's own knowledge of God, loving God, [inaudible 00:06:37] love of God, emerging into and being as much God as God is God, in our eternal nothingness without God. That's the divinization through love, as our destiny.

Jim Finley: What happens in the stirring ... It's a foretaste of that. It's a foretaste. In a certain sense then, it's not of this world. It isn't the love, a gratitude for God in us, but being accessed or quickened by this love that then draws us out to give ourself in love to this love that so unexplainably gives itself to us. That's kind of the poetics of it.

Kirsten Oates: There's like a magnetism about it.

Jim Finley: There's a magnetism. Yeah. That's why I say it's a longing we don't understand, for a union we don't understand, but we know it's true because we've experienced it. Not only have we experienced it but we long to abide in this depth that we don't understand.

Jim Finley: We're coming to the author of the Cloud, all these mystics for spiritual guidance, like what am I to do? What the author does first is try to help us understand what's happening to us and goes on to say what's so good about where you are, what's so mysterious about it is that the first three begin and end here, the common, the special, and the singular. The fourth is perfect, which is God, which is heaven. The fourth begins here, which is you are now in the stirring and it goes on forever.

- Jim Finley: Literally it's already kind of celestial. You're already in this heavenly state in a very obscure way.
- Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. This sense of desire, you're saying it might not feel like a human emotional desire, that we might have for a partner or to be with someone that we love, so it might feel different to that, like an angst or an urgency even. Is that the case, Jim?
- Jim Finley: Yes, it is. With some analogies I think. Some examples would be it isn't just, say, that a person decides to become a teacher and learn the skills of teaching and teach. But rather they feel called to completely give themselves over, to being transformed as a teacher to teach. Like a calling.
- Jim Finley: They can't explain that. See? Someone devoted to healing or an artist or a poet or solitude, it's a stirring of something ... It doesn't overflow into emotions. There's like an imperative of your awakened heart that's drawing you to consummate this longing by surrendering to it. It's like that.
- Jim Finley: That's why it's hard to talk about because it's so delicate. When you try to look at it directly, it goes away. You can't see it but it's like right there stirring within you, by drawing you forward unexplainably.
- Jim Finley: The world that we live in is a world that at every other turn drowns it out, it gets overtaken by this, by this, by this. That's why it's like a flame that flickers in the wind. There it is again, there is it again.
- Jim Finley: How can we steady ourselves to stay in receptive vulnerability to that desire long enough to let it have its way with us? See? What's the artistry of that?
- Kirsten Oates: People with that desire, that have this innermost experience of God, when they hear words from a mystic like The Cloud of Unknowing and people need to find their own teacher but it gives them hope, it rings true, it offers ... You feel like this is something I could follow. Is that part of how the desire manifests?
- Jim Finley: Yes. I think two aspects of this I think are important. Let's say that we ... Like listening to these mystics with the Cloud and it bears witness the very fact we're drawn to it, the very fact it speaks to us, and in some sense, it's for everybody. It is like water falls down, seeking the lowest place, giving life to all that lives.
- Jim Finley: You could be in the special way, like devotional sincerity and you could be drawn to practice this way of prayer and it would grace your life but it would grace your life as someone in a special way. That is to say, you say I'm so grateful for this gift because of my fidelity to this practice, I really am more centered, more grounded, more present ... The virtues of it and the gifts, which is God's grace. See?
- Jim Finley: The Cloud is saying, "Yes, yes, yes. All of that, yes, yes, yes." But it has come to such a point, like a tipping point where the deepest thing isn't the graces that flow into you, but how you're being so drawn to give yourself and go into God. See?
- Jim Finley: For someone ... Because it's so subtle, then when you read the mystics, you can tell

they're talking about what you are experiencing. That's what I think the recognition is. There's a way to talk about this ... It's also clear when you listen to people like this, like you read these people out loud, this isn't hearsay. It's not opinion. You can tell they're speaking out of the truth of how they themselves were transformed in it. That's why it says in the foreword, there are those who presently live in the active life, that is the life of effort, by grace, who are being prepared by God to grasp the message of this book.

Jim Finley: I am thinking of those who feel this blind stirring of the spirit in their inmost being and then he says, "I do not say they always experience this as experience contemplatives do." That is, some people habitually abide in this state and we think this author is one of them ... You know what I mean?

Jim Finley: We come to this secret, to the master, to the teacher, and say, "I want to sit with you so that, hopefully, with God's grace, what might happen to me is what clearly has happened to you" because you bear witness that my heart has not deceived me. You bear witness that it's real. I think that's how the lineage ... That's the relationship to the teacher.

Kirsten Oates: This mystic gives guidance on the possibility of this singular and perfect way, so it gives us hope and clarity around what's happening inside of us, but then he also offers a way of praying, like a method to help stabilize what's happening in the singular way ... Is that how you see it, Jim?

Jim Finley: Yes. In this sense, with this distinction, notice that in all the mystics so far, Thomas Merton, St. John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila and Guigo, there's no method. See?

Jim Finley: What these mystics say is that when you're ... This special way of living a life, that is devotional sincerity and prayer with God and so on, what starts to happen to you is a certain transformative event. For John of the Cross, it's the passage to a dark night, this mysterious deprivation or the loss of solace. For Theresa and the fourth mansion, you realize your heart is being enlarged to divine proportions. For Thomas Merton, it's the deepening of moments of awakening, turning to see a flock of birds descending. It gets deeper, deeper, deeper.

Jim Finley: You practice it and then if you want to think about it, your practice is your fidelity to surrender what's happening to you but they give no method ... You know, however you find your way to do this and follow it.

Jim Finley: What we have here is the Cloud of Unknowing is saying here's a way but notice it's not a method, as it's not contrived like, "Try this. Plug it in and see if the car starts." This method is actually a response to the blind stirring of love. It's concertized in a way that offers the least resistance to being overtaken by this love for this love.

Jim Finley: I think that's ... We're going to see this later when we look at the Jesus pair, the way of a pilgrim, the Jesus pair is another way, a method ... Method in the same sense. It also parallels in the other traditions. For example, in deep yoga, in sacred yoga, namaste, there are very detailed methods to follow, like a lineage. In Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah, there are methods, see? In Buddhism, zazen, Vajrayāna Buddhism, there

are methods.

Jim Finley: These methods are all the art, what's been learned over time, that's conducive to being stabilized in this, as a response to the grace. Otherwise, it's just the ego thinking, "I'll try this." You know what I mean? "I think I'll see what happens." Nothing wrong with that. It's good to try it. What makes it heartfelt is a response to something.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful. And Guigo also would you say is the same idea as the Cloud?

Jim Finley: Yeah. He has no method. In other words, the first three steps of the ladder, lectio meditation and prayer, he said but then what happens, the prayer is the longing and the longing becomes unbearable. See? You're powerless to consummate it. Then you're crying out to God. Then he said God cut you off mid-sentence and crosses over. See? Then ecstatic moment takes it like this.

Jim Finley: In that sense then, these other mystics, it's then how to be faithful to living that way? As it follows its rhythm through the years. The author of the Cloud here is more of a tradition, this "method", this "way" that he proposes.

Kirsten Oates: Which we see as a response to what's happening to us and an openness to God overtaking us with God's presence. It's not a method that has a guaranteed outcome or, "If I do this, I get God all the way home".

Jim Finley: Exactly. There might be some of that around the edges but deep down you realize it's around the edges. Right in the center. Notice, by the way, that this method is very subtle. It's like a non-method method. He said what you do is you sit in a quiet place and you interior-ally turn to that place that's stirred with you, God within you deeper than you can see.

Jim Finley: Then your intention is to take that place that God is stirring within you and in a self-donating act, give yourself to the love that stirred your heart, by giving yourself to that love, see? And so what he's talking about then is that subtle stance and so the method is how to stabilize in that stance.

Kirsten Oates: In chapter three, which you focused on, the author is very encouraging about trying the method. It feels an encouraging word to us to give it a try.

Jim Finley: Yes. Another thing too, he's going to say this in later chapters, he's going to say not everyone is suited for this. He said if it doesn't, don't do it. What matters is holiness. He said but you are to give yourself to it and see if it resonates, because for all of its miraculous qualities, he said for all of this, it's the easiest thing of all. If this flows in the flow of how grace is calling you, there's a naturalness about it. It's un-contrived. It's like that.

Kirsten Oates: I wanted to ask you about that, because he also says, or I think you said as well, that it's challenging. How long would you say you need to try something before you know if it's resonating, if it's just challenging and difficult versus it's not for me.

Jim Finley: Yes. Well, first of all, let's clarify. This will come up later in the next session when we talk about the two clouds. Let's say, first of all, why is it challenging?

- Jim Finley: Let's say this, a key to the author's teachings is that all of our ideas of God, even revealed true ideas of God, are all finite ideas of the infinity of God and illumined by faith, they give us a real knowledge of God. To hear that God loves us is an idea, through the power of the spirit in our hearts, we experientially know that it's true. See?
- Jim Finley: There is this benefit in this special way of these grace ideas but now in the touch ... Here's an example, in the next session I'll be sharing this with them. An example I use for this, for me, it helps me to see this, is imagine somebody all alone in the desert dying of thirst and they're writing the word water over and over in the sand. They're onto a great idea. When you're dying of thirst, there's nothing like a drink of water. The blind stirring of love is the drink of water.
- Jim Finley: It's why is it dark? It's dark because the you ... Those thoughts are still there. See? You've been called to something beyond all thoughts. See? Therefore, because you're still accustomed to thought, we're very bound up with our thoughts. That self that's accustomed to thoughts, good thoughts, noble thoughts, the thinking self and all that it thinks, because we're so accustomed to it, at first, it's very hard. It's a very strange thing. You have to sit long enough for it to catch hold. See?
- Jim Finley: How long do you sit? Let's say, you try it and go, "Wow. That was hard." You try it again, four days later, it's still hard. When is this going to happen? I hope by Thursday.
- Jim Finley: I think it goes like this, first of all, there's like this beginner's mind. At first, you realize you're getting acclimated. It can go on for weeks and weeks. It's still difficult. Even though, it's difficult, you can sense in it a certain resonance. See?
- Jim Finley: It's difficult but there's something here that's kind of quietly shining in the difficulty. See? I feel called to do it. See? I think that's the discerning thing.
- Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yeah.
- Jim Finley: If that makes sense.
- Kirsten Oates: Yeah. That does make sense. Is it a little bit like exercise when afterwards, you know it was good for you but before you might be feeling, "I know it's good for me but I'm a bit tired today" and then during, you might be more in discomfort than comfort but afterwards, you feel a resonance in your whole body with what you just did?
- Jim Finley: That's a good example. Let's say, you've been exercising for a while. So you go out straight for a long run or a long distance whatever it is. It's a certain point where it's difficult and you want it to get to that point where you're burning off, but even though, it's difficult, it's not just difficult. See, there's meaning in it. See, there's meaning in the difficulty because it's a transformative difficulty. See?
- Kirsten Oates: There's a way it's a loving act of taking care of myself and I feel that response in myself.
- Jim Finley: Exactly. I also think recovery from addiction or recovery from trauma and radical commitment to a creative process that won't quite break through, I think this is contemplative character transformation, that in the struggle, we realize we're being

transformed in the struggle itself, like a kind of enrichment or transformation of our awareness.

Jim Finley: Then as we keep going, like runners get their second wind, you realize there's phases where there's like a newfound freedom, where the difficulty falls into the background and the very thing that was so difficult is the very thing that liberates you.

Kirsten Oates: In terms of learning this prayer and maybe giving it a try, I was thinking how if people are already trying Guigo's steps of the ladder, this is something you could try in the midst of that. You know? After you've read your piece and done the prayer or the conversation, you could drop into this at the end. Do you think, Jim?

Jim Finley: Yeah. Here's what I think, when I was growing up, I don't know if they're around anymore, there used to be a brand of chocolates called Whitman's Chocolates. It was called the Whitman Sampler. When you lifted it up, in the lid was a diagram of the chocolates, so you knew this is raspberry cream, this is walnut.

Jim Finley: The thing about going through these mystics is like a mystical sampler, like "hmmm". Two weeks later, "Mm-hmm (affirmative), I'm really munching away on Julian of Norwich. Can't hardly wait." Like a buffet, your buffet.

Jim Finley: I think it's good to see ... We just listened to it, because there's a certain music in each one. There's a certain constancy through all of them. You can "try" them but what you're really doing is settling into the one that sits well with you, because each one contains all of the others, because each one is a modality of all of them.

Jim Finley: The more we see the array of all of them, the more we appreciate its richness, but also we find one that we gravitate towards, because it's attuned with the way we're called. The one that we settle with can change over time. It can be a certain way. We have to be always receptive and open to see where we're being led next.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful.

Jim Finley: Turning To The Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: One last question on the movement from the common way, special singular to perfect, is it the case, Jim, that part of moving from the common way to the special way is there is a certain kind of clarity, certainty, like really feeling God is real in the ways that I am experiencing that in thought or experiencing that in my body or experiencing that, so in a way, it's a bit of a ... I could see why it's really challenging to then be called into this way. You've grasped a certain sense of certainty.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Yeah. That's good. Yes. Here's how I put it. Let's say you're in the common way, and then you don't enter the special way by deciding, "I think I'll try the special way." Something happens, like you fall in love, you have a child or somebody dies or in the middle of the night, you're graced with something or you're listening to the scriptures and it strikes you in a way that never struck you before, so there is this kind of event where you're interior-ally illumined by it. See? And it stays with you. That's the special way. See? Then you seek out the company of kindred spirits, Bible study, whatever it is. Let's say you're in that way ...

Kirsten Oates: I've got a kind of certainty in my heart that God is real, that I am connected to God. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Absolutely. This obscure certainty and I live by it, God enriches me, God guides me, God sustains me and God motivates me to help others. Like the gift of faith. See?

Jim Finley: Then let's say ... You're very much aware that God's presence in you, how it's graced your life, as well we should be. Then from time to time, there's these quickenings, these stirrings, they pass but what they do is they illumine your faith even more. Or they enrich your faith even more. See?

Jim Finley: But then when the moment comes where the longing starts, to leave that behind, see? Then I think you prayerfully discern, like ask God to help you with this, like maybe it's a longing you're not yet ready to respond to. Maybe it's a longing you need to sit with until you understand it better. Maybe it's a longing ... This is why the author of the Cloud says the ... When he talks about these qualities in the second chapter, he says as you take courage now, for ill mortal the way you are, try to understand yourself, don't think you're better than ... He does all that.

Jim Finley: He says, besides, let's face it, the thing is you'll be miserable if you don't do this. See, that's the thing. It isn't my choice. Like pilgrimage, exit ... It's not my choice but it's tugging at my heart. Therefore, I'm going to trust in God and surrender to it, that God is leading me into this way and God is guiding me. I think it's like that. It's a spiritual direction question I think.

Kirsten Oates: These things I was very certain about in the special way, it's just I have to loosen my grip on them. It's not that I might not still live certain of certain things, but I loosen my grip on them. Is that a good way to think about it?

Jim Finley: Yeah. There's this ... I don't know if she's still living but Karina Whittaker. She wrote a lovely book called *A Tree Full of Angels from Blake*. She was on a retreat. We were having a talk. She was invited to make a contribution to some essays. It was on things that I am certain of. As a nun, what am I certain of? It was a collection of things. By the way, one of the chapters was Elizabeth Taylor. Not to know what Elizabeth Taylor was certain of [inaudible 00:30:16].

Jim Finley: What came out of our discussion was this, the things I used to be certain of, I am no longer certain of. The things that I used to be certain of, that I am still certain of, I'm no longer certain of in the same way I used to be certain of. I'm fairly certain this is going to continue. See? Know what I mean? It's like finding an old journal or something. You look back and it's like the grace learning curve where we're transformed through time.

Jim Finley: Like Jonathan Cross, to have no light that guides you except the one that burns in your heart. See? It's a providential certainty. You know? It's a humble certainty. Really, another word for it might be fidelity, obediential fidelity to the promptings of the spirit.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. Can you just describe a little bit more, Jim, this idea of being at home in the darkness? In this cloud.

Jim Finley: Let's say, first, you're sitting in this practice. Like I said, the next talk we are going to talk

about the two clouds, we'll go into this more, and so what you do is thoughts arise, they arise and they fall and you're aware of them, you're not trying to stop thinking, you're not trying to stop the thoughts from arising. You're just trying to learn how not to think about the thoughts that arise. You're aware that a thought is arising, a thought is enduring, a thought is passing away. You're included to want to think about the thought that is arising but if you do, thinking will carry you off into thinking.

Jim Finley: What you do is you're practicing being aware the thought is arising. Now the awareness of a thought arising is not thought. If there was just thought, there'd be no awareness a thought is arising.

Jim Finley: Now this detachment from a thought is difficult, because we're so acclimated to thought. We know that this love that touched us transcends thought. It quietly overwhelms thought. At first, it is hard to sit in the middle still woven into thought and not give into thinking thoughts. This is a new way to be in a way.

Jim Finley: If you don't give up, if you just stay with it, you can learn to be at home in the darkness. What you discover is this awareness has about it a certain richness or depth, the thought cannot comprehend. See? This is why it's not explainable. It is realizable. You can tell when someone is talking about it, like we are now.

Jim Finley: I want to give another example of this. I think we all know this too. I think I shared this in the talk, I can't remember. Let's say you're going to an art museum and as you walk different pieces, you have different thoughts about them, "I notice this, I like this one, I don't like this one."

Jim Finley: Then when you quietly sit and gaze at the work of art, it's a state of heightened awareness and oneness with the beauty, that qualitatively transcends all your thoughts about the beauty. See?

Jim Finley: In the midst of nature, in the arms of the beloved, in the pause between two lines of a poem, we all know this heightened awareness that transcends conceptualization. See?

Jim Finley: Once we find it, we can taste this as a kind of a homecoming, it's a ... You know what I mean? There's a fulfillment here that I'll never find as long as I insist on always circling back to define it, pin it down, have it ... Because finite thoughts of the infinite, like the word water written in the sand over and over, how are you going to keep them down on the farm after they've see Paris? See? Once you've had a taste of what's beyond thought ...

Jim Finley: But there's a kind of thought that transcends thought and it's this kind of thought. Likewise, all the words of Jesus are like this really. Approach at this level. You can approach Jesus at his thought. You can take and study it. It's important.

Jim Finley: But where the Logos lives, it's a call, it's like a meeting or it's an event in your heart, like it's the ... That's why it says in a later chapter, he's going to say turn to Jesus with loving desire. Don't turn to your thoughts about Jesus but turn to the presence of Jesus, who is one with your presence, calling you to itself.

Kirsten Oates: Jesus and these mystics speak more from that place you were describing of the place where

we are aware of our thoughts, they speak out of that versus in this more merged place where we've merged into our thoughts and ...

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. I really do ... You look at the parables of Jesus, like the Zen koans, they're stories. What they're stories of is stories of someone having an awakening.

Jim Finley: As you listen to it, you can realize in some way, the story if you sit with it, is revealing you to yourself. See? It's always calling us to this awakening, like this quickening, this realization, this union like this, and it gets deeper and deeper and deeper.

Kirsten Oates: Just in this first guidance that we're offered in chapter three that you've gone over in your first talk, the first guidance is this trying to find our way into a place that's aware of, and not merged into, thoughts. He also says emotions, right? You said emotions as well in that talk. Even thoughts or feelings about God, thoughts or emotions or feelings of God, we try and stay aware of them. I find the word helpful, joined to them or merged in with them. You know?

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. I think another example I think I gave in the talk is that let's say you've been in this long-term, very deep love relationship with someone and someone you haven't seen in years, maybe you knew them in high school, and you're together and they know this relationship and the person ... They never met your beloved so you describe the person's character and the person says, "No, no. I don't mean that. Who do you know the beloved to be in your love for the beloved?" See? You don't know what to say. I know that I know that I know that I know it. See?

Jim Finley: Therefore, the knowledge that comes to love is a knowledge that transcends all the ideas. They don't negate the ideas. You know, they're not disrespectful to the ideas but it's a knowledge borne of love. The same way is going to say this, this love is not the love that washes over us, which is consolations. There is a love beyond the feelings of love, which is this infinite love. That's the author of our feelings of love, the giver of the feelings of love. It's the infinite love itself calling it to itself. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: This knowledge borne out of love, the author shares some wonderful things from that knowledge about the encouragement that we get from family, friends, the saints, the angels, that when we're trying this kind of a practice, I found that very encouraging.

Jim Finley: Yeah. When I see, and this has always been a lot to me, this sense of things, is this classical contemplative way of seeing things ... See, in God, we live and move and have our being. We're living our life in the vast interiority of God. All the angels are here, all the saints are here, all those who have crossed over. All that's here. See? But we don't see them.

Jim Finley: We don't see the dead for the same way we don't see God. They've crossed over into infinite union with the infinite but in deep meditative states, it's to know that this passage between heaven and earth is constantly inter-penetrating each other. It has this lovely image that when you love God for God's sake, instead of your sake, the angels turn and look at you like, "Wow. Someone has discovered what heaven is about." There's this idea that they circle around you, they're fanning you, encouraging you to love. The souls in purgatory. There's this lovely imagery of eternity in time and heaven and earth. This practice is the gate of heaven. You know? It's a lovely image. It's true. I mean, it is true. We don't tend to think

about this but it's true.

Kirsten Oates: I found it particularly encouraging because we lost our dog in January, Winston, who used to sit right beside me for all these podcasts. When I read that, I realized how in a certain way, I still feel him sitting right there. You know, his loving unconditional presence.

Jim Finley: I think an insight here, I think it was in Merton we were talking about this, I can't remember, is once in the class of Medieval philosophy, at the monastery, or as Dan Walsh in a class, that could we say after the geographical Tokyo no longer exists, there will still be Tokyo. He said, "Yes, because Tokyo is in God's mind." See?

Jim Finley: God never forgets. Everything real is forever. See? When we die, we'll go into this conversation forever. Everyone listening will go into the moment they're listening to it, because everything is forever. See? What's manifested is eternal but the manifestation is temporary. It's a temporal order.

Jim Finley: What's the eternity? Endlessly passing away, the manifests would never pass us away. There's something very consoling about that. It's true. That's a kind of maybe example of a knowledge borne of love.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Can you say that again, Jim? You said what manifests is eternal?

Jim Finley: Yes. Yes. It's what is being manifested, which is ultimately God, God's infinite presence is presence-ing itself, see? Pouring itself out and utterly giving itself away in and as the intimate immediacy of the gift of the miracle of our very presence, the presence of all others, of all things as trees, the stones, the stars, everything, which is the divinity of everything.

Jim Finley: That which is manifesting itself, the eternity of ourselves in God's love is eternal. But the appearance of that which is manifesting itself is temporary. There's the temporal self that experiences the passing away of everything and the temporal self that experiences the passing away of everything is itself passing away.

Jim Finley: What comes welling up out of the depths of the self that passes away is a realization of the self that never passes away, which is the self that God forever loved. Our lives are hidden with Christ and God forever. See? I think that's what we're trying to come here to in a way.

Kirsten Oates: So encouraging. The author suggests to be at this practice playfully throughout the day with whatever the day is asking of you. Do you have any advice about how we might do that?

Jim Finley: Yes. This is my sense. This is my sense. Let's say we're faithful to this practice and it's a practice, because it takes a while to be stabilized in it, it's a habit, it's a daily rendezvous of this way, and then when the rendezvous ends, you ask God for the grace not to break the thread of that rendezvous and you go about your chores, so at first, and for quite some time, there's a noticeable difference between what this is like when you're sitting in rush hour traffic, a noticeable difference when your cellphone goes off ... There's surreality to that.

Jim Finley: What you start to notice I think is an unexpected way, glimpses of this start shining out in incidental moments. See? A sideways glance, a shift in someone's voice. You turn and see something, a tree. Then you realize it's becoming subtle, subtle, subtle ... Like an habituated

sensitivity of being stabilized, this awareness.

Jim Finley: I think that what deepens over time. The way you are when you're sitting and the way you are of when you're taking a glass of water, it's the same. The difference is there but you're aware that God's infinity of the difference itself. You know? The infinity of a glass of water, a sip or to each passing thought. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: God's doing the work to make that happen in the practices and in the openness to God. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Exactly. It's all up to God and it's all up to us. We think of God as generosity, this generosity of the infinite is infinite and we are the generosity of God, each breath, each heartbeat, the sun, everything, all of this is the generosity of God's presence flowed out like this.

Jim Finley: It's all up to God but it's all up to us in this sense, that if we don't pray, there's no prayer. See? If we don't choose it and stand by the choice with grace, the choice hasn't stabilized. It's an act of freedom, it's an act to freely choose to say yes to this and live by the yes. It's an echo of God just to me like that. I think that's it.

Jim Finley: Love is never imposed. It's always offered. It's always invitational. You realize in a singular way, you feel the invitation. See? But then the path is your acceptance of the invitation by living by it.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Beautiful. Well, I want to say yes.

Jim Finley: Me too. Me too. Sounds good to me.

Kirsten Oates: Well, thank you, Jim, for helping us understand even how to say yes and that this freedom is possible. Thank you for today. I look forward to your next session on the Cloud.