

Turning to the Mystics



Julian of Norwich

Dialogue 1

with James Finley and Kirsten 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 six of Turning to the Mystics, where we're turning to the 14th century mystic, Julian of Norwich and her book Showings. So welcome, Jim.

Jim Finley: Yes. Good to start up again. It's wonderful.

Kirsten Oates: It's good to have our first dialogue. Today we're reflecting on your first talk on Julian's book Showings. And I just wanted a little help, a little reminder of this book and what it is, that it's focused on unpacking a vision she had? And so-

Jim Finley: Yes. As a young woman, she was critically ill, near death, and living a devout Christian life. They called the priest to administer the last rites. And as he's holding up the crucifix, in this near death kind of ecstatic, she went into kind of an ecstasy, and saw these very vivid images of Jesus dying on the cross. And she saw that it was vivid to her to understand the cross as love. And so she was so moved by that, she felt that it called to live a life of solitude and prayer, living as a recluse in this little cell off to the side, little church there in Norwich, England.

So she wrote the short text. It kind of lays out these images, these showings with little insights into each. Then the long text, over years later, she very carefully reflects in a more in depth way, offering us spiritual direction. So people would come to her little window for spiritual guidance in her cell. And the other little window looked out on the altar so she could see the mass being celebrated. So by these writings we're able to join the people coming to the window for spiritual guidance. So she's writing out these very carefully written insights into the interior life. And that was her fidelity to the path as a mystic teacher.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for that. That's really helpful. And then in the first session you reflected on chapter 10 from the long text. And I'm wondering why you chose chapter 10 to get us started?

Jim Finley: Well I could have chosen any chapter, in the sense that every chapter is substantive. It's intimate, it's clear. It sheds a light on our own spiritual path and the search for God and so on. But I chose chapter 10 because there's two things that happen in the chapter that are key to our series here. The first, is she makes a distinction between seeking and contemplation. That as she's seeking, as the path of devotional sincerity, efficacious under holiness. And then she says the seeking spills over, it can spill over into contemplation, where it becomes mystical.

So all these teaching mystics are trying to help us discern that point. How do we discern the birthing of a mystical death dimension to our seeking? Because sometimes the awakening of the mystical is very dramatic, like with her, with the cross. But very often actually it's extremely subtle. It's very, very delicate. So how do we understand the nature of the mystical, discern that it's happening to us, and how do we cooperate with it? And then in the mystical, to see the mystical then, we circle back around. And the mystical then illumines the seeking.

So she had these visions. But the reason her insights into the seeking are so beautiful, is they're being illumined by the mystical. And she helps us to see how that happens to us too, we can have a quickening.

And then in the ordinariness of our day by day quiet time with God and daily life, we see that our ordinary experience is illumined by the moment of our quickening. I chose that this chapter because I think it so helps people. It helps us to understand that nature of our own path, that's why I chose it. And then in the next talk, which is the last half of that chapter, then she goes into the cross, mystery of the cross. So the chapter has these two main parts to it. What we're looking at today in this first talk, about devotional sincerity and becoming mystical, and then deepening devotional sincerity. And in the next talk, the last half of the chapter, on the mystical dimensions of the cross in our life. So that's why I chose it. That's why I chose it.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, that's so helpful. And I'm really interested to pursue both those parts of the text, these two parts of the path she described, the seeking and the contemplation. And would it be correct to say, Jim, there's a sentence that struck me in the second paragraph. And I wonder if this is, outlines the seeking path. She says, "so I saw him and I sought him and I had him and I lacked him. And this is, and should be our ordinary undertaking in this life as I see it." You reflected on that.

Jim Finley: Yes, I did.

Kirsten Oates: Sentence, beautiful.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Like a rhythm of-

Jim Finley: It's a rhythm. And I think what she's doing, is when we sit and listen to her, she's helping us put words to our own experience. There was for us the very first moment God became personally real to us. So I saw him, I interiorly realized God's presence, the awakening. And then as that initial way, and maybe I was a small child when it happened. It's so personal for each of us, when that first quickening happens. Then it dissipates. And as it dissipates, it left longing to abide in it. So I sought him, which is the path. And on this path of seeking, I had him. That right in the midst of the seeking God grants another taste of the oneness of God that we're seeking. And then it dissipates and I lacked him. But the lack is only the deepening to renew the longing. And as we just keep living that way through the years of our life it transforms us. It transforms us. So it's a key, I think it's a very helpful way to understand.

Kirsten Oates: It's so beautiful. So simple and yeah, the rhythm to it that we don't always have that sense of complete connection with God, that it comes and it goes. Jim, this is just reflecting on the seeking path. So we're not at the contemplative. So what makes this kind of held at that seeking level, rather than in the contemplative?

Jim Finley: What keeps it held there?

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, what's the-

Jim Finley: Yeah, well, I put it this way. This is my sense of it. If there was nothing but the seeking, with devotional sincerity, that's God. That's a sincerely lived Christian life in the rhythms of how God sustains us and draws us and leads us. And then how that spills over into daily life. And how God is present in our daily living with others, ourself, the world, and so on. But then when the mystical happens, if it happens for us, if the mystical happens then that's what she says. Once in my understanding, I was let down into the bottom of the sea. And how I presented the reflection here is that, on the surface of the water, she's using the image of water, like the sea. Where the winds blow this way and that, we're caught up in the shifts of the conditions of the circumstances that we're in. You're going through your life, I'm going through my life. Back and forth.

But when we pause for our quiet rendezvous with God, we can feel ourself making a kind of a dissent. A kind of quiet dissent into a qualitatively, more intimate, deeper experience of, and oneness with qualitatively deeper dimensions of the depths of God. We can feel that deepening. And we can feel that deepening happening in our Lectio, in our Meditatio and in our prayer. And then it can get to a place, like the bottom of the ocean. Where we drop down into the bottomless abyss of God's infinite love and our oneness with God in love forever. So from all eternity, say our life is hidden with Christ and God, from all eternity in this Trinitarian language that she uses. That God the father, God is origin, is eternally expressing god is the word. Is eternally contemplating himself in the word. And is eternally contemplating you, hidden with Christ and God forever.

So, when God creates you, creates me, creates all of us under the earthly plain here in the waters of the world. God creates us so that along this path of finding and seeking and losing and so on, we might follow this love path. What the mystical is, is that it's a foreshadowing of what happens when we die and pass thru to the veil of death. And we return back to the oceanic depths of God. Because everything in God is God, this is the divinity of us. So when she drops down into the bottom of the ocean, she drops down, she's using a visual metaphor for a state of unitive consciousness or divine union. Which in some mysterious way, it's just God in all directions. It's God's non distinction from us in love. And we're obscurely granted a foretaste of that abiding. We're all abiding in God forever.

So we're talking about incremental realizations of non incremental generosity of love. That all the while God's infinitely giving the infinite love of God away as our very life. But there's incremental degrees to which we realize that, which is the path. But there can be certain moments of oneness, like a mystical oneness, which is the life of the bottom of the ocean. Quote quote is that. And then when it passes, that's where we return back up here again. And when we return back up here again, its illumined by that gift of oneness. Maybe it was very dramatic, like with her. But maybe it was so subtle.

Thomas Burton, remember talked about turning to see a flock of birds descending. And sensing in their dissent that the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. And Teresa in the fourth mansion talks about sitting there in prayer, and suddenly you realize your heart's being enlarged to divine proportions. Where John of

the cross talked the passage through a dark night. So there was this touch. And then the sincerity of our seeking is illumined by that touch. And that's how I think she helps us understand this.

Kirsten Oates: So Jim, on the seeking path, back to Julian talking about the seeking path. She says, "I wanted to see more. I was answered in my reason, if God wishes to show you more, God will be your light. You need none but him. For I saw him and I sought him." And so even on the seeking path, there's this sense of wanting more. Is that right?

Jim Finley: Yeah, here's my sense of this. It's another subtle insight she gives us. The image I have is, let's say we're sitting in prayer, it could happen to us anytime. And we're granted the sense of God's presence. Like we interiorly see God, or we realize God's presence. And that little glimpse of seeing God, we want to see more. If the little glimpse was so wonderful, think how wonderful it would be to walk through the door, go more. And so I wanted to see more.

But then it says, well, the reason you don't, you're not seeing more, because God doesn't want you to see more yet. Because if God wanted you to see more, you'd see more. And therefore you're to trust where you are. Why? Because God's presence is completely given to you. And the love of God's given to you completely as where you are, not where you think you're supposed to be. And when you do see more, God will be the light in which you will see more. So it's like learning to, the where we are wherever we are, it is already infinitely more than enough. Because it's the love of God's sustaining us where we are. And then the more happens in God's good time and the sincerity. Like it keeps breaking through and so forth.

Kirsten Oates: Such a comforting thought. And when I hear you say that, Jim, it's so comforting to me in my being just to hear those words. They ring true, but they also kind of offer a sense of relief or contentment, or you know.

Jim Finley: You know how it helps me too, is I think working with trauma, people in trauma. Or people dying in hospice. And even in our own life sometimes we get caught up in things that are very... A lot of struggle. And to have a kind of trust inside, although we can't feel it. To know that this is where the cross is going to come in later to look at the mystery of the cross. Is that God is unexplainably one with me in the intimate details of my struggle, and I'm being sustained in the midst of it. And then when the clouds clear and the sunlight comes back and then we have more experiential access. We know we're have more exponential access to what's infinitely always there, even in our darkest hour, we're being sustained. I think it's a consoling thing to see it that way.

Kirsten Oates: I'm curious about this idea of the wanting more, wanting to see more. And is it the case that when God grants this graced event, where we have a deeper experience of God. Does God plant with that grace event this seed of desire, this wanting more?

Jim Finley: So I think the paradox is... Let's say that an inside of Julian is that our longings for God is an echo of God's longings for us. And so God wants us to realize that where we presently are is more than enough, because God's oneness with us is incarnate

where we are. But God also wants us to want more. God wants us not to be content with anything less than an infinite union with the infinite love of God, which is our destiny. It's just that as we go along the path we have a deeper understanding of what it means to want more. It's not the more, like qualitatively more. But it's an unexplainable more, of being unexplainably accessed by God ever more deeply where we are. So that's how I understand it.

Kirsten Oates: And it's almost like that's who we are then. That the way you started that is saying, that the longing for God is God's longing for us. Is that just that's our likeness to God. It's kind of part of our being, our natural way of being.

Jim Finley: That's right. And that's where I thought I would read this passage in a book I did on Merton's Palace of Nowhere. I quote Johannes Metz, M-E-T-Z. And Johannes Metz wrote a lovely little book called Poverty of Spirit. Jesus said blessed are the poor in spirit, they shall inherit the kingdom of God. And Metz's language is so echoes Julian and all the mystics really. Metz writes, if man... Again, this uses sexist language, its before they knew better, humanity. If man leaves his dreamy conceptions aside and focuses on his naked poverty, when the mask fall away and the core of his being is revealed, it soon becomes obvious that he is religious by nature. The religion is the secret dowry of his being. In the midst of his existence there unfolds the bond, religio, which ties him to the infinitely transcendent mystery of God. The insatiable interest and the absolute that captivates him and underlines his poverty. At the core of his existence a transcendental neediness holds sway. It spurs and supports all of his longings and desires. Works itself out through them, but it's never exhausted in them.

I like that. So Julian, all these mystics, they touch us with this... It's so beautiful what they're saying. But it's evocatively beautiful. And we're drawn by, and we know it's beautiful because it's true. But we can't grasp it. But the very recognition of the beauty of it is itself the mystery, giving itself to us as the recognition that it's beautiful. So it's like an unconsummated longing that keeps unexpectedly consummating itself in the depths of our longing. That's my sense of it.

Kirsten Oates: I love that piece you read. I think it said in our nakedness, we're all religious. And it just shows the value of all the religions across time and across societies and across, that reveals that longing coming through in whatever context the person finds himself in.

Jim Finley: I think too, John Henry Cardinal Newman, saint John Newman. He said often in life our failures end up being more important than our successes. Because our successes tend to reinforce our illusions about ourself, our failures, we despair, or we go deeper. If this is up to me, it's not looking good. But in my poverty I'm being unexplainably sustained. And God's revealing myself to myself as infinitely rich with God in the midst of my helplessness. I also think, however, our successes that also enrich us. In that in the successes, in conditions conducive to joy, you can break to the high, high joy of God that transcends the conditions conducive to joy.

Kirsten Oates: Oh yeah. Yes.

Jim Finley: And we know this present joy, the beloveds embrace or the sun setting, is an incarnate echo of God's infinite love for us. So at both ends I think God kind of accesses us this way.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I like the second idea much more.

Jim Finley: Oh me too. We all do.

Kirsten Oates: Even though I know the first is true, and there's a certain poetic beauty as you say it. But boy, in real life, it can be a rough place when you, learning through that way-

Jim Finley: Even another thing I think important. You know Julian led a sheltered life. I mean, she led a quiet life. It was a poor, quiet, simple life. So my sense is that God wants us to have conditions conducive to happiness. God wants us to be a non-violent nurturing person. Grateful for the gifts of life, our family, the safety of our loved ones, and so on. That too is the gift of God. It's just that it doesn't lie in our power to always live in conditions conducive to happiness.

And therefore, when that happens, we're moved by God to heal the suffering that's present. We're grounded in a peace that's not dependent on the outcome of our effort. Because the peace of God in which everything depends permeates the unforeseeability of things regardless of how they turn out. So I think we all want, I do, peace and security and happiness. God created us to want that. And to do our best to protect it and extend it. It just, we're being invited to know that there are times in life where it starts to unravel on us. And even now, if we're blessed with conditions conducive to happiness, all over the world, there are thousands and thousands of our brothers and sisters who are not so blessed. And so we're walking with this mystery of death and resurrection, birth and joy. And walking the walk of God present in the world as it is.

Turning to the Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: This idea of this seeking path and this desire to want more. And Julian says, and you've been teaching us as well, that it's up to God, that the more will be in the light of God, God will grace the event. But is there any effort we can make towards the more?

Jim Finley: Yes. The Buddhist talk about right effort, meaning effective effort, graced effort. There's different ways to put it. One is what you've expressed here, is what is it that love is asking of me? And how can I under the promptings of grace, be faithful to what's love is asking of me? To be more loving towards my own body, toward my own brokenness. Toward being more supportive and understanding of the, and honest with the people that I live with. With nature, with the world.

And so we have to actively lean into it. We have to actively be saying yes to this. So it's passive and that we receive it as grace. But it's actively passive. And that we're actively choosing to be receptively open to what's love is asking of us. And whether it be in the silence of prayer, we're sitting down to have a conversation with someone that we live with. We're always kind of receptively open to keep leaning into it, to be present to it.

Kirsten Oates: So it's almost like, if we respond to what we have been given with the level of love we know from what we've encountered, that effort opens us towards the future encounter of it deepening into... Because we're more in the flow of a level of awareness and we're getting deeper into the level we've been given. So then new levels can open up, potentially, if God's willing.

Jim Finley: Yes. One way I put it is, everyone listening to these podcasts is on this path. Anyone who

listens and is moved by it, we're kind of contemplative community together. And then we can say, how has it come to pass that I've come to be the man or woman that I am, capable of being receptive to or appreciative of such things. And is it not true if we look back over our shoulder, back in the day, we were first awakened, we were not nearly as sensitive as we are today. Not nearly as responsive, not nearly... And so we're in the midst of a journey not of our own making. And all that circuitous winding path of this unfolding, that God has begun this work and thus will bring it to completion. The arc of our transformation, is the arc of the sustained sincerity of receptive openness. The abandonment to divine Providence. Jesus called it, I came to do the will of the father, which is the trustworthy nature of what's happening. God's present in the unfoldings of life, even if you're hanging on the cross.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Amazing.

Jim Finley: It is amazing.

Kirsten Oates: So Jim, yesterday, when we were prepping for this talk, you pointed something out to me. It's the beginning of where Julian turns towards contemplation, and it's in paragraph three in this 10th chapter. And it starts with, "once my understanding was let down into the bottom of the sea". And just that she uses my understanding. Can you unpack that a little bit?

Jim Finley: Yes. See how I put it too is, one there's the experience of God's oneness with us. But then there's the understanding of God's oneness with us. What the understanding is, I want to use an example from psychotherapy and working with trauma. A person is seeking to be delivered from an internalized effects of trauma. And in that transformative challenging process, as they kind of feel what they need to feel, remember what they need to feel, which granted to them is insight. And that's what's granted them is an understanding of the suffering. And they start to understand or see clarity into the nature of their confusion, that intimate depth like quality of understanding.

See, I think to the ego to understand is to comprehend conceptually, as I get it. See, I comprehend it. But this is an understanding. It's a deeper way to understand what it means to understand. It's to intimately realize the truth of your own awakening heart, in ways that are ultimately unexplainable. It's the kind of the depth dimension of contemplative wisdom, I think. Like we were doing with Merton. I know what I know what I know that I know. The trouble is it's I who know that I know it. And when I try to tell you what it is that I know that I don't know what to say. Because it's the intimately realized sense of what cannot be explained. And that's the language of the mystic. It's also the depth dimension of everything Jesus says. It's the contemplative understanding of scripture. This deep understanding, I think in the heart. That's my sense of it.

Kirsten Oates: I was also struck by the way, this is like, in the way you describe Lectio. So that she's going through this seeking path and being precise about it. And then out of nowhere comes this imaginative image. And is that, it reminds me of what you taught us with Guigo.

Jim Finley: Yeah, this is my understanding. This is another big thing. Let's say there was for us the original, I found him. And then I sought him and I [inaudible 00:28:20]. And then let's say in the midst of the devotional sincerity, there was for us a mystical quickening. However, it happened like unexplainable oneness. Then the one unexplainable oneness renews the

sincerity or illumines the sincerity of our seeking. So we sit and open the scriptures, whatever we sit and seek. Then in the midst of our ongoing sincerity of the seeking, suddenly precipitously regretted another understanding. That as all of a sudden we're dropped down again into the bottom of the sea, in the midst of our seeking.

And I think that's how it works, really. I think that's how it works. And then when that dissipates we turn again to the seeking, we return again into the seeking. And so these two, that is the mystical depth like oneness and the seeking of the heart illumined by devotional sincerity, are constantly in an interplay with each other. They're constantly in kind of a synchronous kind of unity with each other. And then you get to a point where you realize that even the slightest degree of seeking is itself the fullness of the depth. It's the depth that's given, like the incomprehensible stature of simple things. Like a breath or looking out the window. Everything has this unexplainable divine quality to it. And that habituated sensitivity can grow and grow over time, I think.

Kirsten Oates: And that's really when you're in the, you've crossed over into the contemplative? When it arises back in the ordinary?

Jim Finley: I think so. I think it ripens. That as over time, each in our own way, we become well seasoned in such things. As it becomes an habitual underlying sensitivity to this oneness. And also the underlying sensitivity to the oneness that's there and all that disrupts our sensitivity to it. Like the dogs making noise. I have to let the dog out. So at one level it is the dog, it is disruptive. And there's hammering outside. It really is disruptive. We're just a human being. And yet, although it's disruptive, it's not just disruptive, because everything is of God. Everything has its part to play. Otherwise, we'd be trying to get it perfect. We're lying on our deathbed hoping that we're dying perfectly. We'd hope we exit well, but probably not. I mean, tubes and everything, who knows. But God's the infinity of the intimate details of our passing. Which makes it holy, makes it that everything's like that.

Kirsten Oates: You've spoken a lot about being with Maureen and her last breath. It's like the last breath was perfect. Because it was the return to God. But the rest of it was pretty difficult, wasn't it?

Jim Finley: Oh, it was horrible. Alzheimer's is, just so many terrible moments. Having to bolt the window so she wouldn't jump out the window. Or just jump over the... It was just seizures. And she went through so much. And I was right there with her and everything. But at the very end, I put hospice bed out in the living room, when she exhaled and didn't inhale, death is a cessation. So our first act as an infant when we're born is to inhale. We go through all of our days, inhaling, exhaling, inhaling. And our last act is we exhale. But when we exhale, we're inhaling ourself into God, see, who's inhaling herself into us. And that, so there's something about death, life and death and the giving and the receiving. I'm so glad I got to be with her and see that. And the holiness, and then to senses her deathless presence in it. And just, yeah really.

Kirsten Oates: I'm curious, Jim, for Julian, she seems to have these connections to God, these oneness experience they're very much in her imagination. So the showings, and then even this example of saying once my understanding was let down into the bottom of the sea. And I'm just curious, is that a place we can experience, this sense of oneness in our imagination?

Jim Finley: That's a very good point, actually. In these mystical traditions there's the apophatic and the cataphatic. The apophatic is the hiddenness of it, like John of the cross. Oh dark night lovely, or night lovelier than the dawn. The hiddenness, like the disappearance of the felt sense of God's presence. It's big in Eckhart also, when we do Meister Eckhart later. But also in Eckhart and all mystic is the cataphatic, which is the manifestation, the transfiguration of Jesus. And so imaginary reality, the imaginary is actually a living icon of God present as an image.

I think these mystery teachers are like this. You get this feeling that they very skillfully use images. They bring up experiential metaphors, because they see the metaphor is a visual parable that then allows us, does it recognize in the words, something beyond words. And I think also doing dream work with people, some dreams are like that since it's like a luminous dream. One young analyst said when we're going through, so a deep thing in life, we're struggling with a paradox. If this were a dream what would it mean? And so she's so good at holding up these images this way, as kind of luminous metaphors of God. And then it arcs over into our imagination. It communicates itself like this. That's a big thing right there.

Kirsten Oates: So it may be in a dream or even in a vision that comes to us in our imagination, that we may be drawn into an experience of oneness with God that we might have. It's not just out in nature or witnessing the birth of a baby. It could be in our imagination?

Jim Finley: Let me give an example. Just comes to me, so I'll share. There's this man I used to see earlier was for spiritual direction. It was some therapy too, and he was a physician. And he died of cancer. And he asked to, for me to come visit him in his home. And his wife left so he could be alone. And we were in his bedroom. And he was lying there on his back, we were talking. And he was in a very aggressive treatment for the cancer, and it wasn't working. And I had to be away for a week giving a week long contemplative retreat somewhere. And so I told him, I said, you know I think when I get back next week, I could get a call from your wife that you would die when I was away. Or I'll get a call from you that the treatment kicked in better.

But I get a feeling in all these talks we've had together over the years, it's the same thing. And he agreed with me. And he was looking over my shoulder instead of looking at me. And he was looking over, lying there in bed. And I turned around and looked over my shoulder, and here right outside the window was a trellis full of flowers. And there was a hummingbird hovering in the flowers. And we just turned around and looked at each other and didn't say anything. That moment, do I mean that's, like the divinity of that moment. And sometimes we can learn that with people. There are certain moments in our life that are like that. There are luminous. The image is the presence of God being imaged forth and given to us like that.

Kirsten Oates: Something poignant about it being in the realm of someone dying and the simplicity. Like you said, you go back to the ordinariness. The ordinary hummingbird, the ordinary flowers. But now they're luminous and speaking everything that you are talking about with him.

Jim Finley: And another thing I feel too, one zen master once said, know that when you're boiling water for tea, the boiling water is your life. It's boiling away and disappearing. And then you start to realize it's true. There's certain moments are startling that way. But then you get to a certain point that the simplest act is like that. To stand up or sit down. Child runs by out the street, you look out the window and the child runs... That everything has about it that, you

can get sensitized to that. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Well, even that example of the bird and the flower, they weren't doing anything but being themselves.

Jim Finley: Exactly. He and I weren't doing anything but being ourselves, and there we were. And he died the next day.

Kirsten Oates: Oh wow.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I got back, his wife called me and said he had died Jim.

Kirsten Oates: On the mystical path, if we long for the mystical. This idea of, you talked about calibrating our hearts, it's been a theme of these podcasts. But ways we can calibrate our hearts to be open to this mystical. And one of the ways is to read Julian and read this book.

Jim Finley: And see, this is contemplative Lectio Divina. We read her, she's so challenging, because she's so disarming and simple. She'll say something in one sentence. And then in the Lectio and taking that in when we reflect upon it, we realize we need to just sit with that. Or ask God to help us understand it, and kind of stay with it, and go back to it. So by kind of quietly reading Julian, because she's talking out of this very deep place, it accesses that same place in us.

And even though a lot of it may be obscure, we may realize a lot of it's going right over our shoulder. It's like listening to music, or it's like drinking water. We're kind of getting, its words that take us beyond words, into certain moments of our own quiet and so on. And I think that's why I say, if we read Julian, if we read her words with the same intention in which we wrote, she wrote them, we meet each other. And she wrote to help us experience and respond to God's presence in our life. And when we read her with the same intention, we meet her deathless presence that way guiding us on the path. That's how the lineage is handed on I think.

Kirsten Oates: So this idea that the effort at the mystical level, we can't make the mystical experiences happen. But we can be on this journey of calibrating our hearts to people who have had these mystical experiences, who speak from them. They help us kind of refine ourselves?

Jim Finley: Yeah, Or put it another way, we say sometimes in this series, we can't make them happen, but we can assume the inner stance that offers the least resistance to being overtaken by them. So lovers, they can't make their moments of oceanic oneness happen. But together they've learned the stance that offers the least resistance to be overtaken again. The poet can't make poetry happen. The one devoted to healing can't make healing happen. Where we can act, and that's the practice. And what is that stance? It's the stance that we spontaneously took when the awakening occurred. It's childlike, amazed, open, empty handed, receptive, and that's... So the practice kind of stabilizes itself in that. Exactly.

Kirsten Oates: And just back to the seeking sentence she offered. So I saw him and I sought him and I had him and I lacked him. In the mystical dimension, is that rhythm still present, but operating differently? Or that rhythm ends? What's your sense of that?

Jim Finley: My sense is, this is a mysterious thing, really. I think that when the mystical awakening actually happens, seeking ceases because nothing's missing. And in a way it's a foreshadowing of glory when we pass through the veil of death, nothing missing anywhere. Then when the moment passes, we're given an habitual underlying sense that nothing's missing ever. And yet it is missing, because the dog needs to go out. You know what I mean? There's hammering outside. I got to go fix lunch. I have a headache. I've found a good mood today. I said, I can't find my damn notes on revelations of divines. It was like that. And so, as seeking goes on... And so, it goes on like that, I think. This kind of a unhabituated simplicity, or simplicity of the rhythms of everything has its own part to play in the pattern of the day. Also, I see it.

Kirsten Oates: Making sure we say Norwich correctly.

Jim Finley: Yes. Not Norridge, Norwich. Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Well, I think that we've gotten through all my questions for today.

Jim Finley: I think your questions are helpful, because they're the kind of questions, the list the seekers ask.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: You like spiritual direction. They're like real questions. So I think when they're able to listen to us dialogue, it touches on things they themselves as seekers are asking. And that's how it gets, over time gets clearer and clearer as we get habituated to these things.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Well I certainly hope it's helpful. And then at the end of the series, we actually get questions from people listening as well, which is incredibly helpful.

Jim Finley: It is. Oh yes, it is.

Kirsten Oates: To hear from people who are listening. So, well, season six, very exciting. And I'm enjoying Julian more than I thought I would. That chapter with the seeking and the contemplation, it's so deep and rich and amazing, yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I say this, I think, I don't know if one of the talks, maybe the first one I can't remember. Is that asking the listeners to be patient with me, because the previous mystics, merchants, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, El Greco. I've been very immersed in them for years, and I've known Julian, of her for years. I was at her Hermitage twice. I gave her retreat there at Norwich and so on. But I mean I'm new with her. I mean to absorb her, to sit and absorb her. But I'm reminded as I sit with her just, what amazing woman she is. I mean what a gifted... It's so lucid and pure, it's just she's kind of amazing.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, beautiful.

Jim Finley: Yeah. She is just be very beautiful.

Kirsten Oates: Well, thanks for today. And I'll look forward to our next dialogue.

Jim Finley: Yes, me too.

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.