

Turning to the Mystics



Julian of Norwich

Dialogue 2

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 Julian of Norwich, the 14th-century mystic. And I'm here with Jim and we're going to be discussing his second reflection. Welcome, Jim.

Jim Finley: Good to be back together again exploring Julian, it's very good.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I was amazed that in reading chapter 10, it's so short, it's only a few pages, and you've gotten these two very deep reflections out of it. So the second dialogue is also about chapter 10, but there's so much depth in one chapter. Do you think every chapter's like that, Jim?

Jim Finley: I do. I chose this because it does two key things that are key to all the mystics. The distinction between seeking, I found them and I lost them and I had them and so on. And then the dropping to the bottom of the ocean as her metaphor for the mystical awakening. So it's like her way of where each of the mystic teachers are concerned about clarifying that transition. And then secondly, specifically for her, it brings out into the open her understanding of the cross, like God befriending us and our suffering and our death, and in this mystical image of Veronica's Veil. But in a sense, all the chapters of her book are like that. It's just very intuitively dense in a disarmingly, simple language. Everything she says counts but you have to sit with it and let her take you there.

Kirsten Oates: And she had these visions, she had a near death experience and she's reflecting on the vision she had. I did have a question. These additional visions, the one about the ocean, Veronica's Veil, did they come later as she was reflecting on the initial vision or were they a part of that first experience?

Jim Finley: My understanding is that there's the original showings at the edge of death and this ecstatic state in which she saw these vivid, intimate realizations of Christ crucified. And also God revealing to her the meaning of the cross is love. His meaning was love, she says. So there's that. Then she spends the rest of her life living in fidelity to that and then seeing her life in the light of those visions. So what she does then is she takes the first vision, for example, and then she sits with solitary silence, like a kind of *alexio*, in the light of the vision. And then in the process of that kind of meditative silence, she's given renewed and more interior visions. So not the dramatic imaginary visions of seeing.

It's like with us, if we're in our mystical awakening in our daily quiet time, there's flashes and tastes and insights and the deepening of understanding. And so in a way she's drawing out through years of refined insight into the depth of what's revealed there. And I think our own life is like that. There's an initial awakening that sets us on this path, it might not be as dramatic as hers, but there was a first awakening. But the longer we sit with it and walk with it, there's more flashes and intonations along the way. And she's sharing hers with us. And as we read her, we join her, she helps us to see these things too.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you, Jim, that's really helpful to understand. And you did, I'm quoting you, but in the

last session you did talk about this idea of trying to align our heart with hers and align our intention with hers because she's helping us on this path. So it's just helpful to understand that she could have just written down the visions, but she's spent a long time in this contemplative way, unpacking them and being able to communicate about them in a deeper, clearer way.

Jim Finley: Yes. See, I think when she was in her anchor-hold in her cell and one window looking out at the altar, so she could see the mass, then the other one on the street and people would come for direction, because they sensed her holiness, like contemplative spiritual guidance. Then I think what it was is she realized, or maybe they told her, "Look, the day's coming you won't be with us anymore." And so I think, really, she's writing this for us. She's writing this for us. So in a sense, even though she's been dead for years and years and years, her deathless presence shines out through the purity of her insights. So we're like one of the people coming to the window and we're still being guided by her years later. That's how I see it.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, that's beautiful. Last time we reflected on this first contemplative vision she had about the ocean, kind of dropping down deeper into the ocean. Her understanding, I remembered the word. Her understanding dropped deep into the ocean, and then after that she has another contemplative vision around Veronica's Veil, which is what you unpacked in this session. And is it true to say that they kind of both flow with the same contemplative depth that she flowed from one to the other because there was a resonance between the two stories?

Jim Finley: Yes, I think this is the subtle thing and I think it's at the heart of these mystical traditions, is I saw Him and I found Him and I lacked Him, so that's the seeking. Then in the midst of the seeking, the mist of prayerful sincerity, dropping down to the bottom of the ocean is that when we sit in the silence, we can experience ourselves dropping down into a more interior awareness of, and oneness with, more interior depths of the moment in which we're sitting. And then that depth drops down into the abyss like depths of God, which is the mystical experience. And it goes even a step further. The abyss-like depth of God is who we are in God before the origins of the universe, that our life was hidden with Christ and God, it isn't just that God's in us, but we're in God.

So we're dropping down into who God eternally contemplates us to be in Christ, in divinis, like in the depths of God. And that happens in the quiet of prayer. It happens in the quiet, that dropping down. So what she's saying is that dropping down into that divinity of who we are in God, whatever joy we may be experiencing in the moment, say there's a happiness. When we drop down, we experience the high, high joy of God, that's infinitely beyond the joy that we're experiencing. Because the joy we're experiencing is temporal, it's a moment in time, it's joy. But there's a high, high joy that transcends the joy of the moment, because it's God's own joy that utterly permeates and is the reality of our joy. So there's that. She's saying, however, in times of trauma, the same thing can happen. See, in times of trauma we can drop down into the bottomless abyss, into the bottom of the ocean.

Because we dropped down into the depths of God's sustaining love, because in the very moment Jesus was being crucified, he was being unexplainably sustained in the abyss of the Father's heart, just as we are. So it's like, even though we die and perhaps we are dying and perhaps we're in pain, in the deep down depths of who we are in God, we're being unexplainably sustained in our pain. And when we die, we're being unexplainably sustained

in our death. We die, but we do not die and we don't die because God is love and love never dies. And that's the ministry of the cross. That's what she's inviting to see in the cross because then we can begin to see it in our crosses. We can begin to see it in our moments that we're going through, or loved ones that are going through things, or the world. We can have this sensitivity about it.

Kirsten Oates: So this story, the Veronica's Veil story, I didn't grow up Catholic, so I haven't grown up knowing this story. So I wondered, Jim, if you could just unpack it a little bit more. Where did this story come from? It's not in the Bible, correct? Is that right?

Jim Finley: Yeah. So I'll expand a little bit like I did in the reflection. So in the Roman Catholic tradition of the stations of the cross, you go to any Roman Catholic church, there's 14 stations, seven on one side seven on the other. And each one is a little statue or representation of a scene from the gospels of the crucifixion of Christ. So the first station is Jesus is condemned by Pontius Pilate to death and crowned with thorns, scourge, and he goes on and he falls and so forth, and it goes all the way around until his death. And Pope John XXIII is suggesting that some churches have begun to add a 15th station, which is the resurrection, which theologically makes sense, puts it into a context.

So what happens in the early church is there's this tradition of Veronica who steps out from the crowd to give Jesus her veil. And it goes back very early. So it's kind of a moment in the crucifixion that lives in the Catholic imagination and the archetypal power of the story then found its way into the devotions of the stations of the cross. I just was thinking of something yesterday. I was thinking about this, doing this and never thought of this before, that when I was 14 years old and the first time I read Thomas Merton's journal and he said, "I have but one desire. The desire for solitude. To be lost in the secret of God's face." The secret of God's face can be seen as the face on the veil.

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: Because it's the face is what's God's face and our face. And so the fabric of the veil is the fabric of our lives. And so the secret of the God's faith is the divinity depth dimension of our own face transformed in, and none distinguished from, God's own face revealed in Christ.

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: I never made that connection before.

Kirsten Oates: Oh wow. That's beautiful. So if the cloth is the fabric of our lives, Jesus imprints his face in the cross as present with us in the fabric of our lives.

Jim Finley: Exactly.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Wow. So does this veil actually exist, Jim? Or is it just a story in the imagination?

Jim Finley: Well, you just don't know because of legend and so on. But there is the veil. This believed to be, at least by some, to be the veil and I believe it's present. You look at different sources. It was in different churches over time. It was kept in different places. But I believe it now it's kept in the Vatican. And I think there's once a year, really, there's a liturgy of the saints and they bring out the relics of the thing and they process them with candles and incense and so on. So I believe it's preserved in the Vatican. And it has some comparison to the Shroud of Turin, which is believed to be the cloth that Christ was crucified in. There's some kind of affinity to that, I guess.

Kirsten Oates: And Veronica was made a saint in the Catholic church?

Jim Finley: See, we don't know that she's real, or in other words, it's a lesson. That's a good question. We should look that up. It could be a Saint Veronica. You know Nicodemus? One of the legends is that he and Veronica got married.

Kirsten Oates: Really?

Jim Finley: Yeah, and I thought, boy, to have Veronica and to be your parent. I don't know if that's true, but I don't think she's canonized. I think it just lives on as a moment in the story, the poetics of the mystery of Christ's life. But that'd be interesting, we should look that up. See if there's Saint Veronica.

Kirsten Oates: This is a slight difference between the Catholic tradition and the more Protestant traditions, this idea of the imaginal, the mythical kind of kept alive in the Catholic tradition, more than in the Protestant tradition.

Jim Finley: Yeah. See, what you have in the Catholic tradition early on, very early on, say from the very early church, for example, during Lent, the catechumens preparing for Easter and for baptism by immersion, when they come out of the water, they put a white robe on them, they receive the Eucharist for the first time. So you have a strong sense of liturgy, a strong sense of sacrament in the Eastern Fathers and the Western Fathers of the church, a strong sense of contemplative mystical dimensions, philosophical theology, aesthetics, art, the cathedrals, like a states of spiritual consciousness in stone, like states of consciousness and when you cross the threshold of the cathedral. And so you get this sense of the foundation being in scripture that lived out in the traditions, especially the spiritual traditions of the faith community. But because of the abuses in the church, when Luther corrected those badly needed corrections of selling indulgences and so on. It happened also during the time of the enlightenment and reason.

A lot of that just got caught off, though. The whole thing went with it. So it's devotion to the saints. This is why King Henry VIII, thing on the Anglican Church too, in England, and destroying the monasteries. He closed all the hermitages. So they burnt the monasteries to the ground. There was just such anger at the Catholic Church for its abuse. And so it lost that, so you get this in the Catholic tradition, it's more carried forward than you do in the Protestant. You see it in the Protestant tradition, is through piety and the holiness movement. He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own. The joy we share as we tarry there, no

other has ever known. So there is that heart of the Pentecostal movement, the being born again, speaking in tongues. So it's there, but you don't get it sacramentalized in the same way that you do in the Catholic tradition.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. So given that the veil that goes in this procession once a year, I guess there are people who believe the story is factually true. And then you are also suggesting that there's a sense that it doesn't matter. It's archetypally true, it's mythically true.

Jim Finley: That's right. See, I think that's why Jesus taught in parables, because to get the point of the parable is to get the point of life. The parable is true, but it's not true like a newspaper report. It's mythically true, that is, it reveals a deep truth of understanding how God's present in our life. So it doesn't matter. If you want to believe that it says it, then believe it. But what matters if you do believe it, know that the point is the point of the story, which is what Julian is after and how that applies to us.

Kirsten Oates: And the point of Veronica's Veil is this sense of Jesus being present with us in the fabric of our lives and, in particular, in our suffering.

Jim Finley: And also in dropping down the bottom of the ocean. In other words, that's why I use this imagery that when Jesus lowered his face into the veil, the softness of her veil was the only solace he could find in a world turned harsh. But also mystically, Jesus, when he put his face into her veil, Jesus, without going anywhere, that's the point, Jesus, without going anywhere, dropped down into the bottom of the ocean, into the bottomless abyss of God, where he was being infinitely loved by God, sustained by God, is the living word of God. But as Christ, joining us in our suffering, in his kinetic self emptying, he emptied himself with the ability to know that.

He was with us, he was just right there with us and our suffering. And so then I say poetically, Veronica dropped down and the soldiers drop down, the during crowds drop down, and we drop down, because in God we live and move and have our being. So these mystical experiences are, is this interior sense of this dissent down into joining God in the bottomless abyss of God, sustaining us and giving itself to us away completely as the divinity of our life. And that's the mystical experience. But then, when the mystical experience passes as a momentary oneness, the echo of it lives on, so in a way, the depths of God are concretely being expressed in the concreteness of the unfoldings of the day. And that binocular vision, that kind of seeing of the abyss-like depth of the divinity of everything. It's like God's the infinity of the intimacy of the moment. And the intimacy of the moment is the presence of God. That's a non-dual experience. The holiness of watering the house plants, the holiness of lying awake at night in the dark and sensing this abyss-like oneness. So all these mystics are trying to help us to foster that kind of habituated underlying sensitivity.

Kirsten Oates: And Jim, did you teach in that dialogue that Jesus lost that ability that you just described in the crucifixion?

Jim Finley: Yes. I was sharing that two friends of mine, I graduated, we got our doctorates together and they're reading Julian. And so we talk about Julian together, we go through the texts. And one of them happened to be a Presbyterian minister. And he held that when he heard that I shared with them that he lost, "My God, my God, why have thou forsaken me?" And he

said, "I don't think that Jesus lost his faith. He lost the ability to feel, to experience the faith." And I said, "It makes more sense to me that He did lose His faith, because we do." That's what trauma is. That's what we do. But although we lose our faith, God never loses us in our loss of faith. And so God shared in the loss of God, God shared in our ability to even believe in God.

Because that's what trauma does. You can't even believe in yourself anymore when you're actually flooded by it. And it can linger on and on and on. That's the depth dimension of being traumatized. So I think God became this, when Jesus died, it said He descended into hell, where He would've stayed for three days. And the hell is the loss of God. There is referring to those who've crossed over. In death He went down into hell and brought everyone out with Him. So he goes down into our hell. The moment where we're just, our head spinning with pain and God's hidden in it because God, out of love for us, befriended us and is one with us in the perceived loss of God, who never loses us. That's my sense of it.

Kirsten Oates: So even though Jesus lost his faith and his ability to experience what you were describing, that nodule. So to go through the pain and to hold God's presence, he lost that ability. But you said that he didn't cease to be in God in a hidden way. So that, just in the human experience, he lost his ability to feel it or know it.

Jim Finley: It is how it helps me to see it. In the human experience there's the fluctuations of what we gain and lose. But God is not in the realm of what we gain or lose. So anything that we're capable of gaining, say, the gift of faith, as something gained, is at the same time something that can be lost. By the way, sometimes in moments of trauma we can lose our faith and when it returns, our faith is enriched by the fact that we lost it. We learn something there. And so I think, what we have in Jesus is that God, that's neither gained nor lost, because God's the infinite fullness of reality itself. God empties himself in Christ of that, a boundaryless platitude and joins us, and in a sense, becomes the reality of gain and loss. So even our gain and loss is God, because God joined us in it. So gain and loss. So although we die, we do not die.

Thomas Merton said the monastery, I was right out of high school and I would go in for spiritual direction and he'd usually start out by saying, "How's it going?" And sometimes I'd go and I'd say, "It's going pretty well. I think I'm doing okay." He'd say, "Don't think much of it, it'll get worse. Bad days are coming." As soon as I would come in, just ringing my hands and I'm so like this, he said, "I can tell it's hard." And he would walk it through with me. He said, "It'll get better." So what is it that unwaveringly sustains us and is the reality of all the waivers? I think we're trying to find that. That's the experience, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Wow. That's a very touching story. It brings a tear to my eye to think of him doing that with you.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

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

Kirsten Oates: You mentioned how, when Jesus was hanging on the cross, he lost his faith, but he was able to give assurance to the thief and how sometimes we can assure others when we've lost it ourselves.

Jim Finley: That's really true. For example, my daughter who works with hospice work and just people who are dying and also this can happen when you're in the midst of trauma, sometimes when you're just utterly lost and you're in the presence of someone who's hurting, you're able, out of some hidden depth of yourself, to offer to them what you yourself can't find. I think that's really true. Sometimes we can't. Sometimes we can't always do that, but I do think there's a certain gesture, a certain reassuring gesture that comes out that touches them with the tenderness that leaves us untouched by that tenderness. Which is the mystery of our interconnectedness in God's love, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Yeah. The mystery of love. Yeah.

Jim Finley: But to know that the loss of it for oneself is a temporary, but the love is eternal.

Kirsten Oates: Because it's an experiential loss, it's not an actual loss.

Jim Finley: Exactly, because it can't be lost. Thomas Merton says this, "It's that in us it belongs completely to God and therefore it cannot be lost." But we can fluctuate and vary and lose the ability to know it and to live by it. We do that all the time. So what we're talking about is through a daily rendezvous with God, how to stabilize, put the tapper to the heart and the unwavering depth that's ever lost and then experience it in the waverings of gaining and losing. And so when I'm having a bad day, I really am having a bad day, but I can know I'm having a bad day. So it's real important that my spiritual groundedness does not exempt me from the human condition, but rather empowers me to be present to it because my suffering doesn't belong to myself. There's an empathic interconnectedness with suffering all over the world and I'm called to participate in it.

Kirsten Oates: And then reading someone like Julian, she knew that lesson, she's trying to help us with that. So her words, poetically just help us experientially to enter these places in a mystical way, it's not a logical step-by-step something I know, it's something I'm experiencing.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. I think that's really, that she's writing a sentence by sentence with a flowing sincerity, with clarity and she's writing it to share it with us. So when we slow way down and quietly let in the far reaching implications of what she's saying, we start to join her in it. It's true that we lose it. You know what I mean? Because cell phone goes off or some dancing heads, but little by little over time, there can be an evermore habitually, underlying constancy to knowing that God's with us in the wavering and we can then help others do the same by how we're present to them.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Hopefully the cell phone won't go off today.

Jim Finley: Hopefully, hopefully. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: I had a question about, you talked about God's incarnate longing for us. And my question is, because you talk about the way God kind of becomes the ups and downs with us, that God giving God's self always these ups and downs, is it the same idea with the longing or is that

something different?

Jim Finley: So the longing then for what? God's in the ups and downs with us.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Because you talked about God has an incarnate longing for us. And I'm wondering is it something deeper than this idea of God being present in our ups and downs, more foundational?

Jim Finley: Well, my sense is this, the spirit within us with unutterable groanings is going to give birth to our realization of this love. And our longing for God, which is given to us by God, to long for God is a gift of God. Like Thomas Merton says, "The very fact you're seeking God means you've already found God or God's already found you." And then God touches you with a sense of God. The felt sense in prayer, the consolation, the nearness, and having sense something of the presence of God, then one longs to stabilize and abide in the oneness with God. Now our longing to abide in the presence of God is then, Julian says, is then an echo of God's longing for us. So God creates us as someone to long for God, for in the reciprocity of the longing, union is fulfilled like this.

And that's what she sees, that there's a chapter on, I thirst. When He says, "I thirst..." And what she sees in the "I thirst" is He thirsts for us. And so God infinitely desires us infinitely more than we're capable of desiring God, because God's thirst for us is God. But we're graced with the longing. And then the longing is unexplainably consummated in the mystical awakening. It's consummated. But then as the immediacy of the oneness recedes, it's then present in the rise and the fall of our longings. We know that somehow, this is the poetry of this, how we ought to, my sense of this is, so that even when we're overcome by distractions or suffering or stress, just life's like that sometimes, we get so overwhelmed, we lose the ability to long. We're just trying to get through another day where we just kind of long that event turns out the way we hope, we get overtaken by it.

But then we come to understand that God's longing for us is fulfilling itself in the moments that we lose our longing for God, because God's one with us is we are, and that's what we're trying to be. And that's our trusting, because otherwise we're always in a precarious situation with God. So God's not going, so if you died having a hard day, God goes, "What a shame, you were doing well. Your exit was miserable. You can't get in. I'm sorry. I play it the way I see it." It's not going to happen, but we tend to think it does. We can't get past a gravitational field where the event of the day seems to have the authority to who we are. But what if the only being infinitely loved is the only authority of who we are. And we're trying. So the mystery of the cross is dying, dying to our dreaded and cherished delusions that anything less than an infinite union with the infinite love of God can put to rest the restless longing of our heart. That's the mystery of the cross. I think the crucifixion of that, of those.

Kirsten Oates: So God's incarnate longing for us is fulfilled in God, in just God's present to us, his longing for us is fulfilled. And is it true to say that, you talked about that we might not experience this during life but we'll know it during death, is that the experience we'll have of the fulfillment of our longings and God's longings?

Jim Finley: My work with people in trauma and I also spent two years of internship with my doctoral program and had rotations on lock psychiatric units, and also working with terminal

patients. Throughout the whole world there's many people that are in suffering and they die in suffering. They're dying right now in suffering. And the loss of faith and addiction, the world's a brutal, sad place. We're breathing a very rarefied air here when we talk like this. But we have to believe that God's present in their life, sustaining in their life. So when they pass through the veil of death, the glory is there. They pass beyond the vicissitude of time. And then maybe through us and even just a moment by being present to them, they get a glimmer of something like this. I think it's like that.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. You said that we are here to learn how to love. How does that learning experience relate to this idea of longing and suffering?

Jim Finley: Well, I think one main way, for me, for all the mystics, for all of us, really it's the heart of the gospel too. On mercy. We talked about this before with the other mystics too. Let's say there's that in us that has experientially tasted that of which we speak. That's why we find the words of the mystic consoling to us. It rings true. And the fact it rings true, it bears witness that we are already on the path of which we speak. And we're grateful for that and consoled by that, and it's a gift. But there's that in us that doesn't know it yet and it's the part that's still reactive, is still addictive. The part that's still is wayward and is engaged in ways of living and ways of acting that hurt our own body, hurt our emotions, hurt other people, hurt like this.

And we're tempted. Sometimes we catch ourselves on the act of perpetuating violence on that in us that needs to be loved the most. That in us, it is wayward. That is us that's still lost, that in us that's still, the litany goes on and on. So what the whole mystery of the cross is, I think, what all this is about is that when we transcend the darkness of this world to the unitive experience, it's not that we're carried off into some celestial realm beyond the darkness of this world, but rather we endlessly circle back around to be there for, and with that in us that doesn't see it yet. To be Christ to ourselves, how to be endlessly tenderhearted toward that which is still most broken or most ashamed or most... And that's the Christ experience, I think.

He says, "Blessed are the poor and spirit.", Jesus says. Because it's our poverty deeply expected, is the openness that was the grace of God flows at our heart, the acceptance of our poverty. And I think then that's love. That's love is mercy, which is how Jesus lived. He walked the earth living this way and offering this mercy to us. Yeah. And we're to do the same.

Kirsten Oates: And in the Veronica's Veil story, Veronica was offering it to Jesus. Is that?

Jim Finley: That's right. Exactly. What you see in the Veronica story is that they were empowered to be Jesus to Jesus. She steps out, she's moved by the Spirit to offer the only thing she had, which was her veil, at her own risk. At her own risk. And so when Jesus hands her back the veil and Jesus moves on to be executed. She looks down at the veil and there his faces on it. But whose face is it? And so that's one of the most powerful little things about this story about Veronica. So in some paradoxical way, can we console God, and we console God by consoling someone in whom God abides. There's a Carmelite priest or hermit and he had a lovely image where he said, "If you cut a tree across, you cut a tree, you see the rings in the tree." He said, "But the rings of the tree run up the entire length of the tree."

Likewise, the cross is where God's one with us and our suffering and time runs right up to this present moment we're living in right now. But if the cross runs to it, the resurrection is running all the way up through. And so the oneness of birth and death, the oneness of the life and the death and the eternal life are intertwined together, inseparably, is every moment of our life, which is this moment. That's like deep time, that's the pleroma, like the fullness of time.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I was going to ask you about that. That's hard to get my mind around, what that might mean for me in daily life. That understanding of the life, death and resurrection collapsed as the present moment, I think was how you said it last week, or last time.

Jim Finley: I think we get little glimmers of it. When in the midst of an ordinary day, there's a flash of a little bit of love or tenderness or something shines out. And it was there all the time, but the clouds part. Likewise, we get glimmers of it when we are having a hard time and release happens. So that release was always there, but it was buried under the intensity of the pain. So we couldn't find our way to it. And so if we could start to see that, that the particular pace I'm in right now, maybe I'm in the life of my like, meaning the day-by-day, maybe I'm undergoing a crucifixion, like a great loss. But out of that loss arises the deathless glory of myself. And so it's in the depths of quiet and prayer we taste the resurrected light shining through the details of breathing in and out and standing up and sitting down.

It's a mystical intuition, I think. It's almost like, could we so live this way in love, then in a certain sense, when the moment of our death comes, nothing will happen. Because we've already died to everything. Something obviously will happen when we die, we'll be dead. But interiorly speaking, could we so learned to die of love, that interiorly speaking, when the biological moment of death comes, nothing will happen. 'Cause we've already crossed over. So on our deathbed, you're actually like, "I've been here."

I had a poetic image come to me a long time ago. It says, imagine it's in the middle of the night, and you're in bed, and you're dying alone in the dark, and you know that you're dying. And you're lying there and you look out at the window in the middle of the night and the poetic images, the flowers silhouetted in the moonlight on the window sill seem to know all about it. You know what I mean? There's like a deep homecoming of the primordial divinity of death in this quietness that's infinitely trustworthy and boundaryless, like that. So I think when people come to acceptance in death, that's an image of what happens. But I think we get little flashes. That's what these mystics are about. You don't have to wait till the 11th hour to know it. You can ride with the rhythms of knowing it now in your heart. And I think that's what the mystics are trying to help us do, I think.

Kirsten Oates: It's reminding me when you talk about the life, death and resurrection all being collapsed in the present moment, what you said earlier about the rise and fall, but there's this sustaining connection to God that doesn't rise and fall. It's almost like the life and death of the rise and fall and the resurrection is the sustaining presence.

Jim Finley: That's right. What is the mystery that unwaveringly gives itself to us and all that waivers, and is the very reality of all that waivers? And it's nothing that's without that mystery, that's the poetics of it. And another way I put it too, that's helped me to see this is, let's say we define the present moment as a way concretely as right now, like in an instant. So if I would take

a picture of myself right now with my hands like this, the present moment is. Like that. Okay. If that's the present moment, we could say this, that the present moment never lasts as it perpetually keeps yielding to the future. Because if my hands are like this, the very next instant they're like this. So the present moment, that is what the way it is right now, never lasts because it's perpetually yielding to what we call the future and in doing so becomes what we call the past. So this present moment is the next moment's past. And that's life, death and resurrection. The time itself is life, death and resurrection. I think that's kind of a mystical understanding of the eternity of time.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yeah.

Jim Finley: I like that.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful. Thank you for sharing that, Jim. So Jim, I'd just like to read this sentence from the end of chapter 10 and have you comment on it. "For it seems to me that the greatest honor which a soul can pay to God is simply to surrender itself to Him with true confidence, whether it be seeking or contemplating." In a way it feels like we don't need to know whether we're seeking or contemplating where we can practice this idea of surrender.

Jim Finley: Yes. This is an important sentence actually, really, fortuitous. Let's say that the mainstay of our life is in the seeking, efficacious under holiness. And this is the way I think it should be on our life on this earth. And God's present in it. That's how we follow Christ, finding and losing and so on. And then say we're graced with contemplation, as we're graced with the mystical touch, popping to the bottom of the ocean, like the oneness. And that's not given to everybody. Okay? But the point is this, regardless of where I am, let's say I'm even a beginner learning how to seek. I'm just a newcomer of seeking, even. I surrender myself to God completely in the fumbling ways of just learning to be a beginner, because God's infinitely in love with me as I fumble in learning to be a beginner. That God's love for us is never measured by what we do or don't do.

The sole measure of God's love for us is the infinite expanse of God's infinite love being given to us as we are in each faltering moment of our life. And that's why there's great confidence in being a very trusting beginner. And the more we learn to be a trusting beginner, the trusting beginner suddenly can become a mystical experience. Because we can experience God being infinitely in love with us and our faltering ways. And I think it's like that. Shunryū Suzuki, the lovely book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, and he talks about the perpetual nature of the beginner. It is the one who's wide open to this. The trouble is we accumulate experiences and try to start drawing conclusions and start wondering how far we are and all of that. But we're always returning back around. That really matters is that God's infinite love is sustaining and giving itself to us where we are, whether we're just a beginner or the event, it becomes full circle, they kind of intertwine each other.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. That's comforting. It's comforting. Yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And I think to see that is a mystical understanding. In so far as the poetry, that makes sense. She uses this phrase, "It was given to me in my understanding." The very fact something in me, poetically, discerns the meaning of that, even though I can't grasp it, that's the path. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Beautiful. You said at the end of the reflection last week that Julian's not been one of your core mystics. You're not as familiar with her. So it's been fun to be on this adventure with you, Jim, it feels like you're really taken by Julian and I'm being taken with you in your enthusiasm and your...

Jim Finley: You know what's like for me, say if I would be going back in time where I was traveling around the country giving retreats. So I was practicing here with the podcast. But what if I would start giving Julian retreats? So I would do Merton and John of the Cross. So let's say I would do Julian retreats over a 10 year period. So maybe I would've done, because I would do a retreat every other weekend, maybe I do 15 to 20 Julian retreats over 15 to 20 years. Then I'd be with Julian where I am with Eckhart and Merton. So I'm a beginner. I'm a beginner, but I'm so touched by the depth and beauty of what she's saying, that I'm like a grateful beginner.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, and a certain kind of beginner as the cloud of unknowing would say.

Jim Finley: Yes. That's exactly right. A certain kind of beginner. And we're all trying to be a certain kind of beginner.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Thank you for today.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Look forward to listening to your next reflection.

Jim Finley: Yes, we'll do chapter five.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Thank you, Jim.

Jim Finley: Thank you. Thanks, Kristen.

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.