



Praying with the Poets

T.S. Eliot * Mary Oliver * Emily Dickinson * Langston Hughes * Tagore
Maya Angelo * Jane Kenyon * Dylan Thomas * Rumi * Wendell Berry
Thomas Traherne * Scott Cairns

Community Christian Church – 4601 Main Street – Kansas City Missouri
Session #5 – Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) – born in Calcutta, in the Bengal region of India; educated at home and subsequently in England; shaped by the Brahma religion; expert in Sanskrit, Muslim traditions and Persian literature; author of 200 books (novels, short stories, plays, philosophy, social commentary, essays, and poetry); songwriter; painter; first winner from Asia of the Nobel Prize in Literature (1913); founder of renown school at Santiniketan (“Abode of Peace”) in Bengal region, from which he exerted influence in India’s development toward independence; friend and sometimes philosophical adversary of Gandhi, whose popular title of “Mahatma” (“Great Soul”) Tagore gave to Gandhi; treasured as the composer of the national anthems for India and Bangladesh; conversation partner with Albert Einstein and H.G. Wells – is revered as the greatest literary figure in the history of India and a genius pioneer in combining ancient and modern thought from both Eastern and Western traditions.

Day #1: Prayer as Salutation- In a poem entitled “Salutation,” Tagore describes a complete submission in what may be described as meeting God in all ways and at all times.

*In one salutation to thee, my God,
let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet.*

*Like a rain-cloud of July
hung low with its burden of unshed showers
let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to
thee.*

*Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a
single current
and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.*

*Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day
back to their mountain nests
let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home
in one salutation to thee.*

Pray today that your senses, your mind, your songs, and your life will salute God with all humility and gentleness.

Day #2: Meeting God, Face to Face- In “Face to Face,” Tagore reckons with the daily trek of his life and his ultimate accountability to God.

*Day after day, O lord of my life,
shall I stand before thee face to face.
with folded hands, O lord of all worlds,
shall I stand before thee face to face.*

*Under thy great sky in solitude and silence,
with humble heart shall I stand before thee face to face.*

*In this laborious world of thine, tumultuous with toil
and with struggle, among hurrying crowds
shall I stand before thee face to face.*

*And when my work shall be done in this world,
O King of kings, alone and speechless
shall I stand before thee face to face.*

Pray today with the awareness that God is “lord of your life,” “lord of all worlds,” “King of kings,” before whom you always stand “face to face.”

Day #3: Time – From what would become his most famous gathering of poems, *Gitanjali*, Tagore offered the following poem, “Endless Time,” to the Nobel Award Committee.

*Time is endless in thy hands, my lord.
There is none to count thy minutes.
Days and nights pass and ages bloom and fade like flowers.
Thou knowest how to wait.
Thy centuries follow each other perfecting
a small wild flower.
We have no time to lose, and having no time
we must scramble for our chances.
We are too poor to be late.
And thus it is that time goes by while I give it to
every querulous man who claims it,
and thine altar is empty of all offerings to the last.
And at the end of the day I hasten in fear
lest thy gate be shut;
but I find that yet there is time.*

Pray today in all honesty about your own sense that “... having no time/we must scramble for our chances...” Pray also with confidence that you are *not* “too poor to be late” and that, with God’s grace, you will “find that yet there is time.”

Day #4: God as Poet- In this poem God is likened to being the "Master Poet."

*My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight. O
master poet, I have sat down at thy feet. Only let
me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of
reed for thee to fill with music.*

Pray today that God will use your life - play your instrument, fill your life - with God's holy, joyous, life-giving, sweet-sounding purposes.

Day #5: Love That Liberates- In his poem "Free Love," Tagore describes the releasing, freeing, liberating, unleashing power of God's love.

*By all means they try to hold me secure who love me in this
world.*

*But it is otherwise with thy love which is greater than theirs,
and thou keepest me free.*

*Lest I forget them they never venture to leave me alone.
But day passes by after day and thou art not seen.*

*If I call not thee in my prayers, if I keep not thee in my heart,
thy love for me still waits for my love.*

Pray today with words of thanks for the love that provides, in the words of William Sloane Coffin, "maximum support and minimum protection."

Day #6: Finding Rest- In the following poem, "A Moment's Indulgence," Tagore proclaims that true, lasting rest is found ultimately in God's presence.

*I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side.
The works that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.*

*Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest nor
respite, and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of
toil.*

*Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and
murmurs; and the bees are plying their minstrelsy at the court
of the flowering grove.*

*Now it is time to sit quiet, face to face with thee, and to sing
dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure.*

Pray today for a moment of God's indulgence. (And remember Psalm 116:7 - "Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.")

Day #7: Dream On - In his poem "Leave This," with poetic exaggeration, Tagore describes God as apprehendable in the very stuff of everyday life, even if its is considered crude or crass.

*Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!
Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple*

*with doors all shut?
Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!*

*He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground
and where the pathmaker is breaking stones.
He is with them in sun and in shower,
and his garment is covered with dust.
Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the
dusty soil! .*

Pray today for the courage and grace to meet God in the everyday-ness of life, "down on the dusty soil."

"The Son on Man" - by Rabindranath Tagore

*From His eternal seat Christ comes down to this earth,
where, ages ago, in the bitter cup of death He poured his
deathless life for those who came to the call and those who
remained away.*

*He looks about Him, and sees the weapons of evil that
wounded His own age.*

*The arrogant spikes and spears, the slim, sly knives, the
scimitar in diplomatic sheath, crooked and cruel, are hissing
and raining sparks as they are sharpened on monster wheels.*

*But the most fearful of them all, at the hands of the
slaughterers, are those on which has been engraved His own
name, that are fashioned from the texts of His own words
fused in the fire of hatred and hammered by hypocritical
greed.*

*He presses His hand upon His heart; He feels that the
age-long moment of His death has not yet ended, that new
nails, turned out in countless numbers by those who are
learned in cunning craftsmanship, pierce Him in every joint.*

*They had hurt Him once, standing at the shadow of their
temple; they are born anew in crowds.*

*From before their sacred altar they shout to the soldiers,
"Strike!"*

*And the Son of Man in agony cried "My God, My God,
why hast Thou forsaken me?"*

Rabindranath Tagore - Brief Selected Bibliography

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