



# 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 #6 – Maya Angelou

**Maya Angelou** (April 4, 1928 – ) – born in St. Louis; raised in Arkansas her grandmother; raped at the age of eight by one of her mother's boyfriends; after the sudden and violent death of her attacker, did not speak for five years; gave birth to a son at age 16; lived in California, New York, Cairo, Egypt, Ghana; dancer, actress, choreographer, playwright, screenwriter, director, film and television producer; Northern Coordinator for Southern Christian Leadership Conference; author of 3 books of essays, 3 children's books, 6 volumes of memoirs, 16 volumes of poetry; nominated for Pulitzer and National Book Awards as well as for Grammy Awards; inaugural poet at Presidential inauguration in 1993; Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University, North Carolina since 1981; partner with Hallmark Cards in their "Life Mosaic Hallmark Collection" – is celebrated as a renaissance woman with astonishing talents masterfully expressed in an astoundingly wide array of arts. Her poetry, her inclusive vision, her undaunted Christian affirmations, and her progressive spirit have endeared her to millions.

**Day #1: Community** – In her poem "Alone," Maya Angelou shows how the tasks of being a human being, fully developing before God and within the wonderful gifts that are ours, require us to abide in community. Anything less leaves us dwarfed, shunted, stifled, despairing.

*Lying, thinking  
Last night  
How to find my soul a home  
Where water is not thirsty  
And breadloaf is not stone  
I came up with one thing  
And I don't believe I'm wrong  
That nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.*

Pray today for a solid sense of connection within those communities that help you find a "home" for your soul.

**Day #2: – The Call to Elegance**– In a presentation at the Trinity Institute's "God with Us" Conference, Angelou made a challenging statement that was itself a poetic utterance.

*"Surviving is nice, but thriving,  
Ah! That is elegant."*

Pray today that God will empower you to resist the temptation to settle for mere survival and lead you to the elegant experience of thriving in all that you do.

**Day #3: Rising Hope**– In one of her most famous poems, "Still I Rise," Angelou gives voice to the undaunted faith of the unvanquished.

*....  
You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I rise.*

*Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.*

*Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.*

Pray today that the anthemic determination and courageous hope expressed by Angelou on behalf of the sons and daughters of former slaves may be a reality for all people.

**Day #4: Calling on God, Just like Job**– In "Just Like Job," we hear Angelou adapts a phrase – "I will step out on the word of the Lord" – that her grandmother taught her to use when she needed to act in faith.

*My life give I gladly to Thee  
Deep rivers ahead  
High mountains above  
My soul wants only Your love  
But fears gather round like wolves in the dark.*

*Have You forgotten my name?  
O Lord, come to Your child.  
O Lord, forget me not.*

*You said to lean on Your arm  
And I'm leaning  
You said to trust in Your love  
And I'm trusting  
You said to call on Your name  
And I'm calling  
I'm stepping out on Your word.*

Pray today considering the “*deep rivers,*” “*high mountains,*” and “*wolves in the dark*” that confront you. As you contemplate those challenges, say aloud the phrase, “*I'm stepping out on Your word.*”

**Day #5: Prophet's Prayer-** In the poem “*Savior,*” there is both critical declamation and affirming solicitation.

*Petulant priests, greedy  
centurions, and one million  
incensed gestures stand  
between your love and me.*

*Your agape sacrifice  
is reduced to colored glass  
vapid penance, and the  
tedium of ritual....*

*Visit us again, Savior.*

*Your children, burdened with  
disbelief, blinded by a patina  
of wisdom,  
carom down this vale of  
fear. We cry for you  
although we have lost  
your name.*

Pray today that the span between Christ's love and you will be shortened to the distance of a breath and that the Savior will visit us again whenever and wherever there is need.

**Day #6: A Christmas Prayer Time-** In “*Amazing Peace,*” a poem Angelou read at the lighting of the National Christmas Tree in 2005, peace was the dense and abiding theme.

*It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.*

*On this platform of peace, we can create a language  
To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.*

*At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ  
Into the great religions of the world.*

*We jubilate the precious advent of trust.*

*We shout with glorious tongues the coming of hope....*

*Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.*

*Peace. We look at the world and speak the word aloud.  
Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves,  
And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation:*

*Peace, My Brother.  
Peace, My Sister.  
Peace, My Soul.*

Pray today for peace.

**Day #7: Always Beginning-** In her monumental inaugural poem “*On the Pulse of Morning,*” Angelou compels not only our attention but also our hope through the reminder of a new day's dawning and the use of a commonplace greeting.

*Lift up your eyes  
Upon this day breaking for you.  
Give birth again  
To the dream....*

*Here, on the pulse of this new day,  
You may have the grace to look up and out  
And into your sister's eyes,  
And into your brother's face,  
Your country,  
And say simply  
Very simply  
With hope --  
Good morning.*

Pray today for a renewed awareness of “*this day breaking for you.*” Seek God's blessing on your “*dream*” which is being given birth again.

#### **Maya Angelou - Selected Bibliography**

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*Mother, a Cradle to Hold Me*, 2006  
*Celebrations, Rituals of Peace and Prayer*, 2006  
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**Memoirs** *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 1969  
*Gather Together in My Name*, 1974  
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*The Heart of a Woman*, 1981  
*All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, 1986  
*A Song Flung Up To Heaven*, 2002

This is a part of the weekly series of the Prayer Group of Community Christian Church, 4601 Main St., Kansas City, Missouri 64112, 816-561-6531, FAX 816-531-0805, [www.community-christian.org](http://www.community-christian.org).