



Turning to the Mystics

Bonus: Grounding Ourselves in
Life and Resurrection

Jim Finley: [music] Greetings. I'm Jim Finley.

Kirsten Oates: And I'm Kirsten Oates.

Jim Finley: Welcome to Turning to the Mystics. [bell tone]

Kirsten Oates: Welcome to another bonus episode of Turning to the Mystics with Jim Finley. We're so glad you're with us. We're recording this episode on Easter Monday, and it's been a very strange Holy Week and Easter for us all. And yesterday, Easter Sunday, where we're normally invited to celebrate in community, life, and the Risen Jesus, instead, we're seeing on the news some of the worst days that we've faced in terms of death from the coronavirus. So, in solidarity with people going through this experience, Jim wanted to share an Easter message that will help us reflect on the truth of resurrection, of life from resurrection, so we might ground ourselves in that story as we continue to face this strange time, this sad time, together. So, Jim, thank you so much for taking the time to be with us.

Jim Finley: Good. Thank you, Kirsten. Yes, I'm pleased we can have this session together. I thought this session we would round out this series, at least for now, on how to be contemplatively spiritually grounded in the midst of this pandemic that we're all going through and tying it in liturgically to Holy Week, so how our faith can be that grounding place for us.

And so, I think last time I reflected on Veronica's Veil, the Passion of the Christ, and tying that in poetically. In this session, I'd like to, it seems appropriate with Easter, to tie in a resurrection theme in the Gospels. And this is one of the post-resurrection narratives—in the Gospels, there are these narratives of the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection—and I'd like to look at the Gospel of John, chapter 20, on a post-resurrection narrative. I would like to look at that. And I would like to say, also, about this that this reflection first came to me maybe ten years ago, and I put it aside. And just recently, in the light of this, just resurrected it, so, it was poetic and a little bit open-ended, just the spirit of it comes through. So, in the meditation, you can sit in the spirit of it, and how it might possibly help you.

I think when we read any passage in the Gospels, really, in Scripture, we're attempting to see not just what the narrative is telling us happened in the person's encounter with Jesus, but how the story of the person's encounter with Jesus in the situation they were in reveals our situation to ourselves because it's essentially the same situation. It's the same situation, essentially. And so, I would like to look at it this way. And, especially, I want to look at it in the light of the pandemic in the sense in which we can feel, understandably, individually and collectively, quite overwhelmed, and just unbelievably so. And the more we turn on the images of the media, we feel even more that way. And insofar as we've internalized some of our own past traumas and abandonments, what we're seeing now can reactivate those.

And so, I think it makes this passage, this that we're about to read here, particularly, potentially helpful to us—how do we look at this in the light of the resurrection, and so on. So, I want to read the passage and poetically walk through it with you. This is the Gospel of John, according to John, chapter 20. It begins, verse 1: "It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark when Mary of Magdalene came to the tomb. She saw the stone had been moved away from the tomb."

So, Mary Magdalene was in a situation, and very similar to ours, in that she and the disciples

were just bereft and beside themselves that Jesus had been put on trial, was crucified, died, and was buried. And still in the tomb, everything on which they had based their hopes, were lost to them. And, also, the times were dangerous times. The same forces that brought about his crucifixion could easily spill over onto them. And so, they were sequestered off, afraid, and what are they going to do?

Jim Finley: And so, Mary Magdalene—and very significant about Mary Magdalene because in the Gospel stories, she was a prostitute—and in the meeting with Jesus, she was set free. That is, Jesus saw in her the God-given invincible preciousness of herself, that whatever she may have done, just paled in significance, and she was able to be set free from that in having the power to name who she was and see who she was with who she was in the eyes of Jesus and the eyes of God.

Other passages in the Gnostic Gospels of Mary Magdalene, and so on, didn't see her that way as a prostitute, but they do see her as the Beloved of Jesus, and Jesus is her Beloved. And I'd like to see her, also, as a woman who's on a spiritual path, maybe seeking an interior prayer, this deep bondedness of the disciple with the deathless presence of Jesus. She's us that way, and she's us in this hour of darkness. She was lost. And so, she comes in this state of mind, in this situation, the death of Jesus, she comes to the tomb, and it was still dark.

So, this is predawn on Easter. And I think the darkness is the darkness of the situation. So, she's a seeker. She has the awakened disciple's heart, bereft, and she's all alone. There's nobody with her, and it's dark. And when she gets to the tomb, she sees it's been rolled away. And seeing the stone's been rolled away, second verse, "She came running to Simon Peter, and the other disciple, John, the one whom Jesus loved," and she says to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb," she said, "and we don't know where they have put him."

So, here's the thing, that when we're traumatized, we experience things in a traumatized way, and we have traumatized assumptions about what's happening. And so, she assumes, caught up in the pain of the moment, that someone took Jesus, took the body of Jesus. And so, she runs to get help. So, Peter, verse 3: "So Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb." Four: "They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first. He bent down," John, "and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in." Simon Peter followed him," also came up, "went into the tomb, saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, and, also the cloth that had been over his head. And this was not with the linen cloths that was strewn about on the floor of the tomb but was rolled up in a place by itself."

But here's the poetic imagery to my mind—I would like to suggest that the configuration of the empty tomb is the configuration of the world in miniature; that is, if we could see the patterns of the world are actually being revealed to us in the patterns of the empty tomb, we would have a better understanding of the situation that we're in. And what is that pattern? First of all, he sees the burial shroud, the linen burial shroud, strewn out on the floor. And here, you know, I can't help but do this because this is what's current for me, relating this to the recent death of my wife. In this sense that my wife died very recently actually, and she died right here where we live, right here where I'm speaking to you, really. And so, the linen shroud strewn on the floor is everything right where she left it, when she unexpectedly left. And so, in a way, I can't bring myself to move it because it's where she left it when she left in

kind of a randomness, kind of a holy randomness, of how unforeseeable the parting was, like this. And so, the linen cloth strewn about on the floor is the randomness of the absence of the Beloved, which is the Lord. But then, it says that the cloth his head was wrapped in was rolled up separately off to the side. One text says it was folded neatly on to the side.

Now, I have to be whimsical about this for just a minute because this sets us to wondering: Who folded the cloth? Seriously. Because what you have is an unexpected order in the presence of chaos of the disorder. Because if I go on and open up Maureen's walk-in closet, she was a very orderly person. Everything is hanging there—the whites with the whites, the blues with the blues—everything's in order. So, there's an unexpected order in the midst of the disorder, and we don't know what to make of it. To be whimsical about it, it doesn't make any sense to say, "Did Jesus fold it?" So, he sat up and maybe humming a little "I have risen," tune to himself and folded the cloth, like this? I don't think so. I think we have to go deeper than that. Did an angel come and fold it for him, telling the angel, "Please fold my cloth," like a valet, and, "Yes, my Lord," and folded the cloth?

So, what's going on here is enigmatic to us. That is, it can't be comprehended that way at all. Something much deeper is being revealed to us in the patterns, in the configurations of this. It says then that when the other disciple then went and followed Peter in, "He saw and he believed." So, in that moment, when John sees the empty tomb is for him the belief in the deathless presence of Jesus, was his moment of belief. Until this moment, they had still not understood the Scriptures that he must rise from the dead. They heard it.

T.S. Eliot says in the Four Quartets, "We had the experience but missed the meaning." So here, they had the meaning, "I will rise again," but they missed the experience. So, all of a sudden, John has this experience, this faith experience of the deathless presence of Jesus in the empty tomb. The disciples then went back home. They leave. And then when they're gone Mary was standing outside the tomb, weeping. So, she was the first one to get there while it was still dark. She sees the stone rolled back. She comes and gets them. They come rushing and a lot happens there. They go dashing off again to go back home, and they leave her there. She was the first one there, she's the last one to leave. and she's weeping, crying.

I also think this is a sense of the dark night, like a feeling of being desolate, in a solitary way, in the presence of the Beloved that's no longer present. We don't know where the Beloved is, but we're left alone there in the solitary and of the powerlessness. Then as she wept, she stooped down to look inside. And I think it's significant that she had to stoop down, which I think is humility. You have to stoop down in humility to look inside. And then she saw something that John and Peter didn't see. She sees two angels sitting there—one where Jesus' feet were and one where his head was, like bookmarks. And in between, no Jesus was sitting there. They said, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

I think it's very intriguing, really, because I can't help think knowing that they know why she's weeping. But sometimes, it isn't till somebody asks us what we're crying

about that we know what to say. We get so caught up, and I would say it's true of us, we get so caught up in what we're going through right now in our own life, or the pandemic, all of it, we get so caught up. And let's say we're weeping, but it doesn't necessarily mean at all that we know why we're weeping. And so, the person who asked, it's like the therapeutic question, see: "I want you to listen very, very carefully, and where are your tears coming from? Where are your tears coming from?" And she tells them, she tells them, now, but don't forget though, she tells them, but she's still confused. So, she's very intimate, but she's right at the precipice of a great transformation she doesn't see coming, and it's going to come in the solitary moment that's so enigmatic to her, see, "Why are you weeping?" And she says, she tells them, "They have taken my Lord away," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

She's assuming—again, when we're traumatized, we interpret things in a traumatizing way—so she's assuming someone came and took him, and because I don't know who took him, and I don't know where they put him, I don't know what to do next. As she said this, she turned and saw Jesus. And here, I think turning doesn't just mean that she turned around. I think on the hidden axis of love, something deep in her soul turned in the depths of her dilemma, she was just kind of turning on this hidden axis. She turned around, and she saw Jesus standing there. Surprise, surprise!

But here's the interesting part. It says she saw Jesus standing there though she did not realize that it was Jesus. And so, here she is standing there, looking right at the person she's weeping about because she can't find him, and she doesn't know that the person she can't find is the person who's standing there that she's looking at. So, she turns, and the plot thickens. The plot thickens. The riddle deepens. The closer she gets, the closeness is still one that just deepens her confusion. Jesus said to her, and he asked

Jim Finley: what the angels asked, "Why are you weeping?" So, he echoes. But then, he fine-tunes the question, and he asks her, "Who are you looking for?"

Now here, I would say poetically for us, it isn't just that you're looking for the person who first set you free in which you became the beloved and I, your Lord, but you're looking for the one who saw in you a preciousness you couldn't yet see. And the one who sees us when we're not yet able to see ourselves, that's who she's talking to. And it isn't then just the person then who asked that question reveals her to herself. So, Thomas Merton says, "In the spiritual order, to know is to know that we're known." We might see, in a spiritual order, to see is to see that we're seen.

So, there's a moment then where she somehow, in this moment, in the grace moment, we might say this is mystical union. We might say this is the union. In a moment, she joins God in Jesus in seeing who God sees her to be—the birthless, deathless beauty of herself in Christ, this deathless presence of Christ, like this. See, "Who are you looking for?" And therefore, in this moment then, Jesus in a sense, reveals her to herself because in a sense, she doesn't understand it yet, but she is telling him, "Well, the answer is I'm looking for you." He asked her this but all the while, supposing him to be the gardener. That's really great. You figure that out. Was he dressed up in a cap with a wheelbarrow and hoe, garden hose? Like, she's looking right at it, and

she still doesn't see it. So, she says to him; namely, she says to the one that she's looking for, "Sir," "Mr. Gardner," "if you have taken him away, tell me where you put him, and I will go remove him." That is, I don't care what it takes, I'm going to find him, see, which is the lover's heart. She's revealing her lover's heart to the Beloved.

And Jesus says to her, "'Mary.' She turned around then and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabboni (Master).'" In other words, she turns again. She turned the first time when she turned, now there's a turning within the turning, and she turns when he says her name. Because when he says her name, then that's where he's the one who knows who she is in him before the origins of the universe with the Father Eternal they contemplated her in him, in Christ. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and all things were made through Him. And without Him, it has been nothing that has been made." And there she sees the deathless, birthless beauty of herself in the calling of her name. And in recognizing her own name, which is who she is in him, which is who we are in him, she says, "Master," and I think, really, that's the union right there, like this.

Jesus said to her in the seeing of this moment—and this is almost, we might say, in a moment where maybe in solitude or silence, however it comes to us, this union comes to us—but the God that we're unexplainably one with is the God we're not allowed to touch. In other words, he's not for the having, not for the having. And Jesus then says to her, "Do not cling to me." See, this isn't just don't touch me, but, "Don't cling to me because I have not yet ascended to the Father, but go to the brothers and tell them I'm ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God.' So, Mary of Magdalene told the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and that he had said these things to her." She runs back.

Now, I would say this for us: Yes, he has not yet ascended to the Father but for us, he has ascended to the Father. Pentecost has occurred. So, I would put it this way, poetically, it's really true then that we know in our heart that if we see the gardener, it's Jesus, or we see in the gardener the one in whom in whom the mystery of Jesus is perfectly present as the mystery of the gardener.

If you see your beloved, your husband, or your wife, it is your husband or your wife, but you'll see it's Jesus revealed and given to you in the incarnate mystery of your husband or your wife. If you have a little boy or a little girl, a little boy or a girl, it is your little boy or girl, but you'll see that it's Jesus revealed, and embodied, and given to you as your little boy, as your little girl. And if the beloved is gone, because the beloved has died, or your child has died, whatever, you know that somehow the deathless beauty of the beloved is mysteriously present in the intangible presence of the beloved in the missing place of the beloved because everything real is forever, like this, in Christ, like this.

Jim Finley: So, we know these things but when we are caught up in traumatizing times, the centrifugal force of our anxiety spins us out to the edge of ourselves, and we lose our balance. And so, what are we to do? I think we're to renew our commitment to the childlike sincerity of interior prayer because it's in interior prayer that we slow down enough to catch up with ourselves. Like T.S. Eliot, the axis of the turning world, and we turn inward to this indivisible place of oneness. We get re-grounded in it, not to stay there as separate from the world in pain, but to be present in it without losing our balance, that we're to go out and be more clear-minded, more real that somehow the deathless presence of Jesus is present in

the deathless beauty of everyone who's dying today of the virus. Everyone dying today of the virus, the deathless presence of Jesus is present in them in the deathless beauty of their self in their death. And all the people on the frontlines that are helping them at their own risk is the deathless presence of Jesus.

My oldest daughter, who is a hospice nurse, is in the hospital exposed to this each day. And we start getting a clearer picture, I think, of a way to be more tangibly present to what's happening to us without getting confused and thrown about on the surface of things, and to be present like that.

And so, with that then, I invite us to sit in meditation. And in sitting in meditation, I would like to suggest we could do two things with this really—now just for a few minutes but during the week if you're so inclined—to reflect on this, this way, the spaciousness of it, and what does it say to you like this, a reflective prayer? Take the word as a Lectio, or you could take it as a contemplative prayer like a word, repeat a word. And so, the word might be, “Lord that I might see you in all that I see,” or “that I might see you in myself, that I might see you in each person I see on the TV, in the news. Lord, that I might see you in all that I see,” and see the truth of things and not get confused by appearances so that I can be present to all of this in a more grounded, real, vulnerable, and patient way.

And so, in that spirit then, I invite you to sit straight, fold your hands in prayer, and bow. Repeat after me. And here, by the way, I might add, too, see, “Be still and know that I am God,” this is the stillness.

The stillness of the turning world is this quiet stillness of the axis, which is the stillness that heals us from spinning out to the edge and losing contact with the love that alone is real: “Be still and know that I am God.” So then, in this repeating after me in the psalms:

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

[bell tones] [silence @ 00:26:26 – 00:28:05] [bell tone]

Bow. Slowly say the Lord's Prayer together:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory now and forever, amen.

Jim Finley: Mary, Mother of contemplatives, pray for us. St. John the Evangelist, pray for us. St. Mary Magdalene, pray for us. Blessings to all of you.

And so, now here along with me in the sharing of this session with you is Kirsten Oates, who's my point person with the CAC, and keeps an eye out for me. And so, we're here together with this offering for you. And so, now she's going to ask me a couple questions. We're going to exchange in a little dialogue with each other hoping that it will help you fine-tune some of your own insights, and so on. So, yeah, Kirsten, so, yes.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you, Jim. What a beautiful reflection, they're just wonderful. I've heard a lot of your teaching, and I hadn't heard that one before. So, it was really powerful to listen to it.

I had a couple of questions. One was around just really resonating and identifying with when you use the word "powerless" and the "chaos" of the tomb, so that Mary felt powerless. And, also, when she entered the tomb, that sense of chaos, not knowing what had happened—powerless to know, powerless to do anything—and it really did resonate for me with the current situation. And that in this moment, that sense of all that I thought was stable and tangible, and in place, feels in a state of chaos, and I feel very powerless over that.

Jim Finley: Yes. This is my sense of this. I think this is where really two dimensions of our lives touch each other. Let's say one level of our life, we could speak of as our experience of ourself in ego-consciousness. And I say this now in terms of psychology, of mental health, that we all need a basic sense of self-efficacy, and we all need a certain sense that we are endowed with certain capabilities, and we can seek to actualize those capabilities. And one of those capabilities is to keep ourselves safe, and those we love and care about safe, and have some active role in helping other people in the world do the same. This is important for all of us.

And sometimes, I think actually as we go through adult life, we get trained in a certain field to help make some contribution to the human enterprise, to that kind of thing. And a lot of the meaning of our life is found in that, and that's important. That's really important. But if that's our base of operation, that is, that has the final say in who we are, then, when we run into moments where we lack self-efficacy, that is, we can't find within us the resources to rise to the occasion, and if our sole base of operation is our own abilities, then it creates this crisis within ourselves.

Now, at the human level, what we're to do when that happens, which is a traumatized state, is we need to get help within ourselves, through prayer, another person, or whatever it is, we need to get help to recalibrate again, to get our footing so we can go on and figure out what happened, and you can call out the field of mental health if you want, or physical health, whatever.

But there's something else here at stake, is that these feelings of powerlessness, while they're very fragile in that they can be quite overwhelming are also moments that they touch a deep truth about ourselves. And one simple way to put it would be this: To be at the deathbed of a dying loved one, it becomes tangibly clear that our next breath belongs more to God than to us. Just as we did not have the power to bring ourselves in existence, we don't have the power to keep ourselves in existence, breath by breath, heartbeat by heartbeat, it doesn't lie within our power to generate our next heartbeat. It's a perpetual granting.

So, somehow, the moment of powerlessness, where it falls away, is a moment where the ego is trying to get its balance. But instead of rushing to reinstate itself, it can see that as a moment of potential transformation of being unexplainably sustained by a power that's sustaining it in its powerlessness. And once we've tasted amazing grace, amazing grace, I think then that's the depth dimension of the healing encounter and that allows us then to return to the fray, like to return to the challenging task of what

Jim Finley: love asks of us, but grounded in a love that's not dependent, or a peace that's not dependent on the outcome of our efforts because we tasted directly for ourselves the invincibility that sustains us in our fragility. And so, I think those perspectives, I find helpful.

Kirsten Oates: That's so helpful, Jim. And the moment in the story where Jesus says her name, "Mary," and you feel that sense of the rush of grace, "I was always here. I never left you."

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, and you feel her sense of reinstating that sense of Jesus, and grace, and connection.

Jim Finley: It's true. Yeah. It's like joy. It's a deep joy of an ultimate identity of who she invincibly is in that love, and they're one in that. That's the joy of the encounter. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Another question: I was really struck by the angels asking Mary, "Why are you weeping?" And you reflected on how often we don't know why we're crying until someone offers us the gift of asking us. And I feel like in today's society, crying isn't the norm. We're taught not to cry or to hide our crying so that we may need another question for friends and family, and people we're in relationship with, because we might not see them weeping.

So, what might that question be, Jim, do you have suggestions? Maybe, "What are you sad about?" or "What are you struggling with?"

Jim Finley: Well, I think that I'll speak now as a therapist, I guess, too, just as a human being, but also then of faith, I want to apply the faith dimension to it. Let's say if you come to me and you share with me what you're afraid of. I call that coming out from behind the curtain to risk self-disclosure because if you share with me what you're afraid of, you're sharing yourself with me. You're sharing yourself with me. And, therefore, you have to trust that I'm someone who's safe to be with in that way, that I risk what hurts the most in the presence of someone who will not invade me nor abandon me. And then, knowing that I'm not alone in my pain, it can help me not to invade or abandon myself and to learn to be there for myself in my pain.

So, that's one thing. We're always respecting the vulnerability and the privacy of each person. We can't go barging in. It has to be an invitational stance. And sometimes, we're capable of being there and they're not ready yet. So, we have to let them not be ready yet. Life, it's just that. So, anyway, we're sensitive to those dynamics, like that. And we're also sensitive to ourselves like, what is it that's weighing on us, and where could I find someone to share what's troubling me, like an unresolved matter, and where can I find-- And so, that's why we help each other out, hopefully. It's tricky because sometimes we're the ones who aren't safe. So, we're trying to navigate our way through a complicated world, and we're trying to be someone who's not part of the problem by being a nonviolent, nurturing, attentive person.

But there's something else then we would say is that, see, it isn't that I'm weeping because I have lost this person, or that thing, or I'm scared, I'm worried about. And maybe I should weep. It's a huge loss. There's a lot to weep over. But what we're suggesting here, the deep weeping, arises from the traumatized capacity of knowing that I'm unexplainably sustained come what may, so that even up to and including the moment of my death and beyond, I am sustained.

And so, my real weeping is, although I know the poetry of that, I have not yet found a way to habitually abide in that. And so, that's it. But that weeping, we bring to God, and the weeping we bring to God. I

Jim Finley: like The Cloud of Unknowing, he says—excuse me, The Ladder of Monks, Guigo—and he said, “What we do in deep prayer, we feel a deep longing for this oneness with God, and we realize we’re powerless to consummate it.” But then we realize we become inconsolable. But then we’re consoled in the grace of being inconsolable because otherwise, we’d say, “You know, Lord, I think I can get along without you as long as I have my flat screen TV or as long as I get my job back.” And God goes, “Really?” And then, he says what happens is we cry out to God midsentence, and then God unexpectedly crosses a line and consummates what we’re powerless to consummate, which is the unitive experience.

So, I think there’s the interactive gentleness with each other, helping each other out, we’re all in this together. But then, the taproot feeds all of our fears, which is the prayer, the deep-faith prayer, grounds us to be present to that in a more viable, I think, enriched way, I think.

Kirsten Oates: That’s so helpful. Thank you.

Jim, I’m wondering if you’d be willing to share with our listeners how this last week has been for you, and if you’ve done anything specific to take care of yourself?

Jim Finley: Yes. I’ve done several things. One, I’ve continued to do what I found helpful. That is, it’s really not true that I hate being here without Maureen here. At first, I hated it. It’s not true anymore. I deeply dislike it, but I don’t hate it, big difference. It’s a huge difference. And I realize the reason I dislike it but don’t hate it, because if I hated it, I would hate reality, and this was in the deal going in when we met each other, and all this, this was the deal going in.

And knowing that she got to go first because she didn’t want to live without me, it’s a love offering I’d gladly give, and I’ll be dead soon enough myself. And my two daughters call me, I’m in touch, CAC, faith community for me. And so, really, I sit here in this beautiful place we’ve lived in for all these years, like a hermitage, and look out at the ocean, you know, the way of the widower. And it’s a time for me, I think, to come to a certain kind of clarity, a certain layer of the teaching that I could-- Sometimes we can’t simply teach until we’ve arrived there, otherwise, it’s just words. And so, it’s things like that that have helped me. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Well, thank you for sharing that. It’s very touching to hear this journey in real-time. And, yeah, it’s really helpful.

Jim Finley: And I would say, too, about the pandemic—I say this, too, as a therapist—it’s always good to remember we see it in general—you hear the stats on the news—but to realize that every person traumatized in the pandemic, is a trauma pandemic pain that’s energizing deeply personal pain that each one of them is going through. There’s always that to keep in mind in terms of holding these people in prayer, keeping ourselves in prayer. It’s, you know, always innermost to all of us, yeah. It’s true.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Well, one thing I wanted to share that I did this last week, this was an idea that came from our fabulous producer, Corey. We were having a chat, and he was sharing how he was paying for his services even though he wasn’t receiving them, so not paying ahead, or just paying for them as if he was receiving them. And it’s so funny when you’re trapped in your own little worlds, and I hadn’t thought of that. I mean, I’m just not getting my hair cut. I’m not getting my dog’s hair cut. And so, I just didn’t even think of

that. So, I reached out to a few different services that I normally would be using on a regular basis and offered to pay for those services as if I was getting them.

Jim Finley: And similar to what you said last week, Jim, when we were talking about when I did the shopping for my neighbor, the gift of love and gratitude that flows between people, and who knows why I'm the one that still has an income and is in this position and why someone else isn't, but how can I use that gift to support others, and then, you find the gift is really—

Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. So, thank you, Corey, for that fabulous idea.

Jim Finley: Oh, that's good. That is good.

Kirsten Oates: Before we leave, Jim, I've got a couple of-- We've had just an amazing amount of beautiful emails from people who've been listening to the podcast. Your teaching, Jim, is really resonating and impacting people in wonderful and amazing, helpful ways. So, I just wanted to read a couple of those to you. You haven't heard these yet.

So, one from Rose. It just says: "I think an important point you raised today is the idea that what we do for others is mutually beneficial, otherwise, we can fall into the trap of me, the helper, and you, the victim, the one who needs my help. It places me above somehow. And as someone who struggles with humility, this is tricky. I also really appreciate the reminder that what happens in this world, no matter how dark or how dark it gets, it cannot overrule the light of God. I cannot visit my friends in the nursing home right now, and I'm overwhelmed with pain and sadness that they are alone. Their basic needs may be taken care of, but who is bending down and talking to them, or listening to them, or just holding their hands? So, I visit them in my mind and my heart. I imagine all the people who have been or are now alone, and I join in with them. I cry and then I go on with my day." That's from Rose.

I know your daughter, Kelly, is one of those people looking after people.

Jim Finley: Yeah, she is. And another layer of that for me, that last one about the nursing home, is that her daughter, my oldest daughter's daughter, she works in a nursing home. And because of the pandemic, family members are not allowed in. And so, here's this young woman who sits with these extremely sad people, and it gets to her. She comes home, "How do I handle this?" And that touches me because I identify-- See, I think when we love someone, the reality gets to that had I died first, and I could have, when Maureen was in her dementia, she would have been one of those people, I mean, just bereft, lost. And then when I think how many people are like that right now while we're speaking, and how do I open my heart to the suffering of the world without being traumatized by the suffering of the world? See, how do I open my heart to that? I can't unless I sink the taproot of my heart in a love that sustains us in it and transforms it, all the more reason for the centrality of God's presence in prayer. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you, Jim. And then, this last one really touched me when I read it. And, Jim, today, you talked about seeing the deathless beauty in everyone. And this note comes from a mother who saw the deathless beauty in her son. And so, I wanted to share it with everyone.

So, it says, “My son was in a car accident on December 30 and suffered a traumatic brain injury. He was in neuro ICU and conscious for a week, then his body went into failure, and he passed on January 20. He was thirty-one and a very strong, kind, gentle, loving, beautiful soul. It was a very traumatic experience for our entire family and all his friends who loved him very much. He was the light and joy of a mother’s heart. Then, the coronavirus happened. We had to close our family business. Life seems very surreal and strange.”

Kirsten Oates: “I shared my story because the podcast helped me open up to the process again of leaning into my feelings. It gave me a perspective on the love of Jesus and God’s presence and participation in our lives. I especially liked when James said, ‘This is the view from the cross.’ That rang true for me.”

“I’ve wondered if the grief and pain I am experiencing brings my son any sadness or pain? Someone shared that he is with God and feels only love and compassion for us who are grieving the loss of his physical presence. That brought me hope and solace. I feel my son’s spirit. I believe his love, compassion, and presence are encouraging me. I’m grateful for this quiet time away from life as it was and view it as a gift, a time of reflection and healing.”

“I appreciate the helpful comments at the end of the podcast for self-care ideas. I’ve been doing many of those things and it does help me to move through the day in a more peaceful way.” And she just says, “Thank you so much for what you’re doing.”

So, thank you, Jim, again, for today. I hope you can hear that your sharing and your teaching is having a big impact on this community. We’re grateful for you, and we’re grateful for hearing from people and how they’re being touched. And I know I learned a lot from reading that letter about a mother and her son.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And when I was saying last time, whenever we help anybody, it blesses me too. I mean, it’s so providential that we have a monastery without walls kind of thing through the internet, and I’m able to sit here on my own home like this and share these things that have so changed my life. And so, it gifts me, so what goes around comes around. Yeah, I’m grateful.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, I wonder before we close, just to build on what you told us today about turning to interior prayer, I wonder if you might offer us a prayer to end our time together today?

Jim Finley: Yes: Lord God, we, in our fear, imagine that you’re sometimes far off even though deep down, we know that you’re always closer to us than we are to ourselves. Sometimes, we go about worrying so about how this is going to turn out even though we know deep down, ultimately speaking, that the ultimate victory of love over suffering and death is unexplainably assured, but we’re just human, [music playing] and you’re with us and you’re one with us in the unresolved matters of our heart. Help us to be there for and with each other that we might be sustained and grounded together in the love that sustains us in this and every situation. And we ask for this in your son Jesus’ name.

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.

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