

Turning to the Mystics



St. John of the Cross: Dialogue 5
with James Finley

Jim Finley: Greetings I'm Jim Finley.

Kirsten Oates: And I'm Kristen Oates.

Jim Finley: Welcome to Turning to The Mystics.

Kirsten Oates: Welcome Jim, to this dialogue about Session 6, John of the Cross, we're coming towards the end.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: I think this is your second last session we'll be discussing.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Good to be with you.

Jim Finley: Good to be with you too.

Kirsten Oates: I was struck by, there was a wonderful phrase you talked about that we're turning to John of the Cross for guidance, and then you said, "What kind of guidance do we get? We get mystical guidance." And I loved hearing that. And today you wanted to start by reading something from John of the Cross to help us enter into that sense of what mystical guidance is.

Jim Finley: Yes. I didn't include this in the recorded session, but afterwards, I thought it's so important actually, because I did include it in Teresa and Thomas Merton on this mystical spiritual world, the spiritual worldview of contemplative Christianity. And this is John of the Cross' commentary on stanzas 38 with the Spiritual Canticle, and then he's speaking to God, "And then you will give me you my life. You will give me there what you gave me that other day." And he's going to comment what he means by that other day. And the reason I think this quote is so important is in our society, we tend to think of the mystical as an experience that we have, or a certain experience. And how do we understand that experience how to respond to it.

Jim Finley: And John of the Cross here, like all these mystics, is what is the origins of the mystical experience? Where does it start? And it doesn't start with our experience of it. Our mystical experiences are awakening to mystical experience that has its origins in God. So I'll read the texts and then reflect on it for a couple minutes.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful.

Jim Finley: And this is Article Six. "Let us see what that other day is in which she hear that is the soul mentions, as well as the meaning of the word what the God gives her on that other day, in which she asked to have afterwards in glory. Whether that other day, she means the day of God's eternity, which is different from this temporal day. In that day of eternity, God predestined the soul to glory, decreed the glory. He would bestow on her and give it to her freely from all eternity before He created her. And this what, that is the what that he gave her that other day. It's so proper to the soul that no event or adversity, whether great or

insignificant, will suffice to take it from her, but she will obtain the endless possession of the what to which God predestined her from eternity. And this is the what, which he says he gave her that other day, and which she now desires to possess openly in glory.”

Jim Finley: I'd like to comment on this for minute because it's not obviously clear. See what John of the Cross is saying here, I think is that in our lives here on this earth, we first know God. We first know of God's eternal oneness with us as God's gifts are finite intellect illumined by faith with God's infinite oneness with us. So to the gift of faith, I hear that God's infinitely one with us. God is closer to me than I am to myself or fear, not Jesus says and so on. And so I take those words in and through my finite intellect illumined by faith, mediated through those words, I know that God is one with me. Likewise, I know God's desire for me to be one with him is mediated and given to me through my will.

Jim Finley: I've touched in my will. So in my will, I moved in my finite will to move, to give myself in love to my faith understanding that God eternally wills me to be one with him and so on. That is our knowledge of God. The infinite presence of God is mediated through our finite intellect, our finite intentions, our finite will and so on, efficacious under holiness. It's real. It's true as in a mirror, darkly in an obscure certainty and so on. But when we die and pass through the veil of death into glory, it'll be unmediated infinite union with the infinite union with God forever in the light of day in glory forever.

Jim Finley: So John of the Cross is saying, what happens on earth here with mystical is infused contemplation, is God decides not to wait to begin to introduce us to unmediated union with God like an infinite union with God unmediated in the finite, but infinitely given, which is the beginning of the mystical. And this mystical consciousness, which is now exploring in the Canticle, which we come to and passage to the dark night, where did it begin? It began before we existed, because on that other day, God eternally contemplated you in Christ The Word, and you were predestined in Christ The Word, to infinite union with the infinite mystery of God. This is not the predestination of Calvin, where some are predestined to be saved. And some aren't. This is the predestination from eternity before we existed, that brings us into existence. So in passing through this life, we might enter into glory and it might come full circle and infinite union with God, it comes full circle.

Jim Finley: What mystical union is, is that glory that awaits us in passing through the veil of death. God decides to give it to us now, and we start to receive an unmediated infinite awareness of the infinite presence of God infused by God into it us. That's why it's passive. It's from God. It's not our doing. And then receiving it. And the dark night frees us up enough to receive it. Then we're endowed by God mystically, to give ourself in love to the infinite love that gives itself to us. So in the reciprocity of that love, we have mystical union. And on this earth, it's obscure. It's always hidden and obscure, but very deep and vast and real and true. And so John of the Cross is trying to help us see this big picture where all starts in God's mind of a dream God has for us. Come through earth to these mediations of God's presence in the glory.

Jim Finley: But now with the charism of mystical awakening, the unmediated union with God is starting now deep within your heart is the influx of God being, for Saint Teresa of Avila, this begins with the fourth mansion. You realize your heart's being enlarged to divine proportions. And I think this is important to see this as what makes The Mystical mystical, is

having its origins and its destiny in God. It doesn't have its origins in our awareness of it.

Kirsten Oates: And is it true what the mystic speak of? Is it true for all of us, but we're not aware of it? Or what's the nuance there?

Jim Finley: It's true for all of us in that it's the essence of our identity as a person created by God, in the image and likeness of God. And that sense is true for all of us. Is also true for us that we get intimations of it, mediated through faith, through constellations, reassurances, like is through a veil, is through for us. And it's also true for us that I think that we all have moments of mystical awareness. We're graced for the quickening. We're a realization of the presence of God in and as the mystery of our life. And one is with the beloved one is with the child. One is with the night, we all have moments where a momentary mystic. But it's not given to all of us. It's a charism to have it be your primary thing. It's your primary calling. And it doesn't mean that you're more holy than those who don't have it.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: But rather it's a charism that helps you to see how ultimately holy everybody is. And so if it's your vocation, if it flows into you and tugs at your heart, He's offering spiritual direction to those to whom they realized this is happening to them. And they have no one to help them understand what's happening.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful, Jim, to start us off there today. You talk about the other thing that tends to be common with The Mystics and their worldview is, in your words, "They assume we've done our homework and set our foundations." And as I reflected on that, it feels like the church today isn't necessarily helping us set the foundations that might lead us on this path.

Jim Finley: Yes. My sense is I think what the church does do in liturgy and the homilies and liturgy and so on, it really does help us to have these mediated awareness's of discipleship and what it is to follow Christ and how Christ mentors us and how God loves us and we're to respond to love. And how we're to respond to God's presence in ourself and one another and in the earth. And so it does do that. I also think it does the mass itself for liturgy itself, prayer itself, or prayer, which you don't hear very often. Is this sense of this possibility of an ever deepening communion, this realizing in a humble simplicity, and we can learn to follow it and listen to it. It's true you really don't hear that very much, unfortunately.

Kirsten Oates: I think also in a lot of churches, you don't hear about this idea of oneness. We've got-

Jim Finley: You don't. I think in the Protestant traditions, you do see it in the prayer meetings, the Amish prayer meetings, and you also see it in the devotional or as some of these deeply prayerful people, but also the Protestant tradition was formed in the Age of the Enlightenment. So when Luther, in a badly needed reform of the Roman church, was badly needed. When he opened up the text and interests of the Enlightenment, he saw it as a truth in the text. And so he was reading the Bible outside of the liturgical sacramental, mythic aesthetic, contemplative, mystical, philosophical, richness, the

ethos of it, where you use apologetics proof text back and forth. And then the church and the Counter-Reformation joined right in. And they started quoting other proof texts back. And so even though it is followed all the way back to the desert fathers, desert mothers, and to Jesus, this mystical, it got lost along.

Jim Finley: It's always there, because you can find it in the hearts of contemplative people, in monasteries and it's there, you can go to it and there, it's right there, but it's a well kept secret. And I think a lot of people who feel it tugging at their heart, they feel something's missing, but they do not know what it is.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: And they don't know how to receive guidance in it, which I think is the essence of the living school. Thomas Merton, is really helping people to become aware of this union and guidance and how to follow it, which is this podcast.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, would it be fair to say that the Enlightenment really grounded Christianity into the finite and into the using the finite sensors more fully than ever?

Jim Finley: Yeah. So what it did was using Gabriel Marcel's language, it grounded it in the realm of reason as an objectively real truth that you can go to and verify through logical elements and what gets missed in all of that. For example, in the earlier session I did on levels of marital love, for example, solitude and art, the more two people deeply love each other, the less and less inclined they are to claim that they'd be able to adequately find their love, that would do justice to it. It's the intimate immediacy of the ineffable of it. And that gets lost.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: And I think that's what we're searching for. I think we're trying to get reestablished in our heart and that. Yes.

Kirsten Oates: So Jim, when The Mystics like John of the Cross and Teresa are assuming we've done our homework and set our foundations, if we haven't built our foundation on this possibility of deepening into oneness or our oneness with God as a reality, do we need to reset those foundations? Do we need to?

Jim Finley: I think so in this sense, what about mystical awakening? Say the taste of oneness and the call to follow it. It comes as it comes, is given to whom it's given. And sometimes when quite young a person can be given a taste of this and you can spend your whole life learning to be faithful to what was given to you there. But what you find is that if you don't build foundations of psychological, spiritual maturity, there's always a distance between your awakened heart and your ability to be habitually grounded in a living awareness of that which your heart's been awakened to. And so we're circling back around to take care of what does it really mean to be a deeply reflective person to carefully ponder and reflect upon these things? What does it really mean to ask all things considered what's the most loving thing I can do right now for my body, my mind, this person, this family, this community? How do I live that? And so on.

Jim Finley: So in order to have foundations as supports that which transcends the reason, we have to stabilize in the clarity of reason illumined by faith, incarnate and loving attitudes, translate it into action and which is holding us. And so there's that. So there are mystical people that is deeply mystical people for whom those connections haven't been made yet. I mean, every everyone's life is everyone's life, but the idea would be that you... So for example, The Cloud of Unknowing is speaking of this oneness. And he says, "Unless we've meditated often on Christ, and the death of Christ," he said, "We will go astray in our purpose." And St. John of the Cross starts out by saying, "We begin by basing our life on Christ, but how can we do that if we've not studied his life?" And so as that deep reflective, prayerful lived internalization's that they're assuming as the basis, like grace builds on nature, we do that.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. So one of the ways we can reset our foundations towards this journey of oneness would be to read scripture with that sense of our relationship to God, Jesus's relationship to God in mind.

Jim Finley: Yes. I was listening again to another recording, I like Eugene Peterson, on the word, the minute, he's so great. And he was talking about it. He said a lot of people engage in Bible study, but they don't read it. So what is it to open the scriptures, like an unlearned a child in the presence of God and take to heart everything that Jesus says, every word of scripture as a lived presence within yourself and practicing it until those patterns of incarnate grace start becoming a secondary inner attitude. I like that. And I think it does require that. The Mystical is greatly helped to the extent we're faithful to doing that homework in this reflective life illumined by faith as the groundedness for which The Mystical emerges is incarnate.

Kirsten Oates: And Jim, we were having a different discussion this morning, but just talking about how that can be an isolated lonely path, because there's not a lot of good community that operates in that manner or with that understanding.

Jim Finley: Yes. I would like to add something else too. Maybe a scripture is not your primary way to your own self be true. And so it might be like the teachings of The Mystics or Thomas Merton or a poet. So what you do is you find first, as Master Dogan says, find that person whose words awaken your heart with the desire for the great way and forget everything else. And so, although theologically scriptures the foundation within yourself, it might not be your primary way for scripture, maybe a certain spiritual teacher, but you found your teacher when the one they put words to your own heart's longings. They help you put words to stirrings within you like that. And next there's a certain loneliness to this in this sense, I think, that I mean, everyone's living their life doing the best they can and everyone to his or her own way is finding their way in a community of faith.

Jim Finley: Every one's living their faith as best they can. Everyone in their own way has these mystical moments, this oneness, but where it starts becoming the foundational lens through which you see everything. It's fairly unusual and therefore, there's a certain solitude that comes with it. But you realize that you're talking about it all the time. Every time you talk with love to somebody, you're not explicating the far reaching implications of that love talk. And then once in a while, you'll look for openings where a personal will ask a question at the birth of a child or a death or a solitude, and you see little openings have a little discussion and sometimes you'll find another similarly awakened person. You can get together with them

and share at that level. And so I see one of the values of the podcast are those who are being so drawn, find in the podcast these resonances, like a tonal quality that something's being talked about, that can't be defined or conceptually understood.

Jim Finley: It can be anteriorly recognized that this language is about what is emerging within me, but there is a certain loneliness, maybe it is. But I think that's true with anyone who's radically faithful towards transformative path. It's lonely to be a poet or to be an artist, or to devote yourself to the poor where there's a love path. You invest yourself in it in a way you yourself can't explain it. But if you don't do it you're not being who you're called to be. And I think that's the solitude. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Just reflecting back when you were talking about the tonal quality, the resonance, that that's really when you found your teacher, right? It's theb when you have those sensations, that the tonal quality, the resonance in my being, I feel drawn to it. It's saying something I long for it.

Jim Finley: That's right. I also think that since we all are this ontologically in our being, you can find people talking, you can tell a certain moments they're there in this wavelength. There's a unitive open-ended wonder or amazement or fidelity to something. And you can tell. But the people who consistently talk at that level and talk about it, and also has to do with our tradition, the person who so touches you might not be in your own tradition. I am the Catholic tradition, but maybe a Zen master, or Rumi. I can tell there is point of convergence out of a tradition that transcends all traditions. But I think we're most at home with a mystically awakened voice in our own tradition, but we're open to wherever we hear it.

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

Kirsten Oates: I wanted to reflect on the discussion you had about deprivation that the passage through the dark night is the sense of being deprived of the ways that we normally had experienced God in our finite senses. And I do wonder back to our discussion about the church and its general teaching that, do you think for many people it's a deprivation of noticing that the church isn't meeting that deeper sense? I remember when I was at church, so many people saying, "I just want to go deeper. I want to go deeper." But they didn't seem to be a pathway to get there.

Jim Finley: Yes. But let's say about deprivation, which is really asceticism like a ceases. Let's say that in any loving relationship, we can tell there might be certain patterns of the way we talk to the person, treat the person, react to the person that we can tell the person does not experience as loving, but we can tell we've internalized them. Maybe we grew up with it, withholding intimacy or anger or judgemental or resentment. And so we have to practice a deprivation of these habits like survival habits formed in trauma and abandonment. And with God's grace, we need to work and emerge and grow out of that. And I think that a ceases for love ask of us to grow out of and beyond patterns of compromised love. Well, we can tell we're attached to them, like Merton says, "There is in each of us something with which we must struggle very hard where it will destroy us." He said, "This is the cross in our life."

Jim Finley: And so that's our inner work always. Is like an alcoholic. So the alcoholic is, they're addicted to what's destroying them and the process of freeing from it, they know they can't do it

except to their higher power. And it's certain a tremendous struggle for their very life, really. But if they see it through and come out the other side, they are so grateful. And then they notice that sobriety leads to emotional sobriety, to spiritual sobriety. And so John of the Cross is saying all that holds true. He's assuming all of that. And in Christian life, our asceticism or attitudes of the heart that are contrary to this unconditional merciful love revealed to us in Christ. How can I free myself from this with God's grace?

Jim Finley: John of the Cross is saying something more radical than this. He said, "To the extent, I'm identified with these finite means of experiencing the infinite presence of God, efficacious unto holiness, God in my beliefs, God in my thoughts, God in my aspirations, God in my ministry, God in my struggles. As long as I'm identified with that, as having the final say on who I am, there is no room for God to infuse into us as infinite union."

Jim Finley: So God lovingly weans us off our attachment to those patterns by simply taking it away from us. So we go to our place of prayer and we're not nurtured by prayer. We're not nurtured by meditation. And if we stay the course, if we just stay there and let it do its work in us, you see, we begin to realize not at first, we begin to realize the emergence of this general loving awareness without regard for anything in particular, which is the gate of heaven. And is through that quiet openness that there's influx of God's presence streams, unexplainably into our heart. And that's the sense of it I have.

Kirsten Oates: You mentioned that it unfolds in our limitations this infinite experience. What did you mean by that?

Jim Finley: Let's say I'm drawn this way. I see what my awakened hearts prompted me to do. I'm being encouraged to follow the guidance of God and moving beyond the frontiers of my own abilities. I've been moved by God into a sweet powerlessness to let God have a way with me, I can tell that. And then I start monitoring how well I'm able to pull that off. And I go, "This isn't going well. Unless something kicks in here pretty soon. I don't know if this is going to work for me." John of The Cross's book, *The Dark Night of The Soul* is the faults of beginners. And he takes the seven capital sins and he talks about people, not yet awakened. And what they're all about really, is they say, for example, the sin of pride. What they start doing is they start comparing themselves to other people and start realizing they're more holy than the people around them. Or they get jealous that other people seem to be holier than they are.

Jim Finley: So it goes down the whole litany where you're not freed up. So the whole issue is this. I think really? Yes, I'm on this path and yes, because I'm just a finite human being, be unexplainably drawn to you. I can't do this, but I don't have to because you take me to yourself unexplainably in my inability to do it, which is the gift of tears. And I think that's what, to me, that's the feel of it. We can't do it. That's what I mean by you can drop the symbol into the ocean, but you can't get the ocean into the symbol. So as long as you're still trying to get the ocean into the symbol, that's confusion. And that's the ego trying to attain something or not attaining something. But we dropped the symbol into the ocean, that which we can not attain is attaining us in our inability to attain it. So the deep acceptance of the limit is actually the place for God enters into our heart deeply exist. So it comes more and more boundary-less or more and more unexplainable or more and more vast in our ordinariness.

Kirsten Oates: That's really helpful. I just want to repeat that Becky said something like at the place of the limit, if we can deeply accept our own limit to attain God, that's where that cooperation can begin to happen, where we-

Jim Finley: Yes. The way I put it as for an earlier talk, Martin Heidegger speaks of two different ways of understanding the horizon. He said one way, is a horizon is the point beyond which we can't see. So if I go to the ocean side of the house, I look out at the horizon, I can't see over the horizon. He said there's a more interior way of understanding the horizon. The horizon is the point at which the infinite unmanifested is manifesting itself. So in contemplative consciousness, the palms of my hands are God's horizon. My beating heart is God's horizon. The divinity of the immediacy of things is my horizon. Adding to that, my limits are God's horizon because my limitations deeply accepted is God limitless presence pouring itself and giving itself to me and overflowing my limits in the midst of my limits. It's like that.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, really beautiful. Well, I wanted to ask you if you'd be willing to turn back to the Merton quotes you offered in the session so that we might unpack them a little bit together.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: So we're using Thomas Merton's book, The Inner Experience notes on contemplation and we're in Chapter 6.

Jim Finley: That's right. And I want to say something too. It might've mentioned this. This is a book that Merton was writing when he died in his hermit. So this is like his final thing. And then he went to Asia and died there in Asia. So he died there with it unpublished. And so it was post humorously published. So you get the latest Merton, on this living as a hermit in the monastery. And he directly refers her to St. John of the Cross and directly refers to this Canticle, this infused contemplation, The Mystical contemplation, this mystical because it's God acting in us, in consciousness and in our heart. And he makes a number of bullet points to help us guess what this infused contemplation is. And so the first is an intuition that is this infused contemplation. It is an intuition that it is lower level transcends the census. Can you hear that noise outside?

Kirsten Oates: Only slightly.

Jim Finley: Beautiful. That's good.

Kirsten Oates: Did you hear my dogs bark earlier?

Jim Finley: I did, only slightly. I couldn't hear the snoring though. (laughs) All right. Let's move on. So let's say I'm sitting in prayer and let's say, there's this influx of this infused contemplation coming. And I can tell something very important is happening, but I can't explain it. So a place to begin is it transcends the census that the emotions. It may overflow into the census is an inner warmth, but it's very clear that the overflow in the census is infinitely less than what it is, is flowing into us. So I'm beyond than sensible constellations in the census. What's

important is I'm also beyond the deprivation of constellation in the census. Like in the dark night, because of the deprivation of consolation is just the deprivation of what's infinitely less than what I'm looking for, is unexplainably giving itself to me. So we're crossing over here in the census, beyond the census.

Jim Finley: And on its higher level, transcends the intellect itself. So anything I've even capable of comprehending or thinking, is infinitely less than the divine knowledge is being secretly infused into me. It's God's knowledge of God and God's knowledge of who I am in God being infused into me, transforming me into itself as my knowledge given to me by God. And that's the first point.

Kirsten Oates: Can I ask a question about that?

Jim Finley: Sure.

Kirsten Oates: I wonder if this is an experience of what this is describing, but often when I'm, even listening to your sessions to prepare for these dialogues, I have to go very slowly. I'm often pausing and having to take a break and coming back, but there's a sweet pain to the listening. It's hard to describe, but it's almost like it's just on the edge of overwhelmed.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: And I know it's true and real and beautiful what I'm listening to. And that I have to titrate myself a little bit.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: Years ago, I was giving a retreat up in Northern California at the center up there. And it was a Catholic Zen master up there, Sensei, the Thomas Han. And there was a Catholic Sensei, Buddhist gathering. Their Zen gathering and they asked me to speak there. And so I spoke like this to the group and a person raised her hand. She happened to be a nun. And she said, "I've some of my friends here and they all know I'm not an emotional person, but suddenly, as I listened to you, for some reason I want to cry." And I said, "Well, when I'm talking, I want to cry." And I think that's where, I call it, the realm of eternity. I think that also has to do you go through an art museum, the hush silence of the museum, and there's a certain moment you're standing there in complete silence and you're at the edge of yourself too. I mean, there's something so intimate. So unexplainably intimate that you know is very, very important. And you're at the sweet edge of yourself, which is really the hidden center of yourself. And so this language is mystical language. It's a language in the service of the unsayable or the cadence or rhythms of the language embody the unsayable, it makes it a living word. It goes right to the heart, I think. And that's my sense of it.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. That really resonates. That sense of being right at the edge of myself.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: And it's hard to hang out there for a long time.

Jim Finley: Yes. And we don't need to, but I do think this, if we make frequent visits, if we just do it every so often, it touches us, it touches us. Or if we just occasionally surrender ourselves over to it, it's so delicate. We don't stay long enough to let it have its way with us. But if we keep making faithful to the visitations, little by little by little, sometimes it's very so like water filling the marshlands. It's very hard to discern the point at which it happened, but there was a tipping point at which little by little it's become habitual. And that's what these mystics are about. They're trying to guide us to that point, because that's what happened to them.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: That's what happened to them. And they say they're offering spiritual direction for those who are being drawn this way. And they know how hard it is to receive guidance in it because it's so obscure and delicate, but I think that's a big part of it, that edge one. And then realizing as the longer you sit with it, it's really the hidden center of yourself.

Kirsten Oates: Wow.

Jim Finley: From what you become exiled by the centrifugal force of circumstance, you've been drawn out to reactivity, to the coming and goings of things.

Kirsten Oates: So helpful. Thank you.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Number two, because it's beyond the intellect and beyond the census, hence, it is characterized by quality of light and darkness. It's like an interior seeing of what I can't see, or a deeper way of understanding what I can't understand. It's when I try to reach out the habit, it recedes further away, when I surrender that I can never have it, it draws closer. We learned to live in that betwixt in between place for the union, becomes habituated. Knowing and unknowing is beyond feeling and even beyond concepts, but there are the concepts to bare witness to what's beyond concepts, which are the teachings of The Mystics. So right now, we're using concepts.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: These are words on a page, but they are certain kind of concept. It's a concept that embodies the trans conceptual realization or attempting to share with us. I think,

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I love those phrases, they're so helpful light in darkness, knowing in unknowing, there's a kind of knowing that acknowledges unknowing as the ground of knowing.

Jim Finley: Yeah, that's it. I think I said to the student on the podcast that John of the Cross says, "And God grants it to some people to understand that everything remains to be understood and understand that everything that remains to be understood is a deep way to understand what it means to understand." Which is God's knowledge, unexplainably living itself in our heart, and how can I learn to be comfortable with that or see it as...I mean, It's that. Its discovering one's own unique way of breathing that air and sharing it.

Kirsten Oates: It makes you quite humble as well reading that phrase, and I guess this is part of the isolation too, because even we're being told it's unexplainable. So it's hard to talk about it. It's hard to explain. So there's a humility to being on this path.

Jim Finley: John of the crisis says, "We should not cherish what we don't understand, because what we do understand conceptually and reflective consciousness. What we do understand is finite. What we don't understand is infinite." But there's a deeper way to understand which is intimate understanding.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Pardon me, I don't speak English. But I can recognize when it's being talked about.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: That's the thing I know what it's been. That's why he calls it a what, the what that was given to me that day. Something was given to me that date, but I don't know what it is. I can't grasp what it is, but I can realize that I can join God and knowing who God knows me to be in a deep realization. I can never explain.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. [crosstalk 00:41:20] It's amazing the subtlety built into his words and the way he offers the teaching. That's amazing.

Jim Finley: And I think too, it's why we need to be if you're drawn to do it, just sit with these passages and just love being perplexed, seriously.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: And as you just read it slowly like a riddle or a colon or a parable, and then pick out one sentence that touches your heart and keep reading on. And the longer you do that, connecting the dots, things that were before unclear start becoming clear because you're getting acclimated. We're drawn into this, that's the contemplative Lexio I think.

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: Number three, in this contact with God and darkness, there must be a certain activity of love on both sides. First of all, in the sight of God, it's already taken care of because God's infinite love. God's got it covered.

Kirsten Oates: God's got it covered.

Jim Finley: But on the side of the soul, there must be a withdrawal from attachment to sensible things, a liberation of the mind and imagination from all strong emotional, passionate thoughts. But it doesn't mean that we would draw from sensuality or the census because they're consensual as poetry is. But we would draw from attachment to the sensual because to the extent we can cling it or have it or not have it, we're being led beyond having and not having. So there's a spirituality of sensuality. There's this spirituality of knowing beyond conceptual knowing. So that's the subtlety of this need to keep oneself clear minded about what one's about. One feels called to do.

Kirsten Oates: Merton uses that word clinging. It's such a helpful word.

Jim Finley: It is.

Kirsten Oates: Hanging to it.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And again, the subtlety of it is not to cling to the extent that one's not able to stop clinging and get disheartened, like drafts. I thought I could turn not the cling, but it's so plea. So one even has to be completely detached. Letting God's will work in us as we are, we're a work in progress, surrendered in His love. And four, contemplation is the work of love. And the contemplative proves His love by leaving all things. Even the most spiritual things for God in nothingness, detachment and night. But the deciding factor in contemplation is the free and unpredictable action of God. He alone can grant the gift of mystical grace and make himself known by the secret and affable contact that reveals His presence in the depths of the soul. What counts is not the soul's love for God, because God's love for the soul, which transforms the soul into itself, secretly and interiorly, in poverty, in humility and unexplainableness like that.

Jim Finley: And then jump down to, let's see, by this knowledge of God, it's not an unknowing, it's not intellectual, or even in the strict sense, effective emotions. It has not the work of one faculty or another uniting the soul with this object outside of itself. It is the work of interior union and identification in divine charity. One knows God by becoming one with him. One apprehends him by becoming the object of his infinite mercies. And lastly, number six, just in capital letters, contemplation is a supernatural. That is, it's a godly God knowledge. Contemplation is a supernatural love and knowledge of God. Simple and obscure infused by him and to the summit of the soul. That is the innermost hidden center of the soul, giving it a direct and experiential contact with him. That's hidden. And he says, "To find the treasure that is hidden, you yourself must become hidden." So you must become detached. But the thing is in this hidden, because it's completely hidden from the one who's receiving it, but it radiates out a gentle light. It illumines the faculties with mercy or amazement or attentiveness where everything's unexplainably trustworthy, nothing's missing anywhere. And one learns to live in the light of that.

Kirsten Oates: Given that you knew Merton, what do you think about him doing that number six in capital letters? It's quite stuck on the page. You think this-

Jim Finley: Yeah. Corey says he is yelling. The website talk, capital letter. What I think is this, he puts capital letters in this sense, there is a sense in which you have nothing to do with it. You can't reach it, you can't lose it. And if you could find it or lose it, it's not even what we're talking about. When Merton says, "The person who says, prove it, not only are they not at bathroom, but not even in the ballpark." You're overtaken by it. It comes welling up and grants itself unexplainably to you. And that's why it's in capital letters. And it grants itself to the inner most hidden center of the soul, to the summit of the soul. So the way I visualize it, if we draw a small circle, say the size of a dime and that's the hidden center of the soul, the person that we are called to be, then there's a wider circle around it, which is our human nature endowed with the capacity through faith to know the presence of God. So most of God's visitations enter the ego and illumine the mind, illumine an affect, illumine intentions. And so on. What happens here is that the love of God infinitely beyond us passes right through the ego, right into the hidden center, like a shooting star. You don't even know what happened.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: And then the inner most, the God who is within mingled with you in God before you were born, radiates right back out and bypasses you again. So the ego is bypass. So as for betwixt in between the two infinities, that are one and that's why it's in caps. But secondarily, the overflow, the aura sweetly illumines the transformed ego and John of the Cross spends a lot of time talking about those graces in this virtual Canticle. The touches of love and the longings and the journey like the love journey of one so transfixed

Kirsten Oates: That image was so helpful and I can really sense the confusion for the ego. I didn't see that.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And what was that?

Kirsten Oates: What's happening?

Jim Finley: It's on the cross, that's why he calls it a what, the what. He says, "You would know that it's happening, but you're not able to explain it." That you don't know what it is because what is the act of the conceptual mind to define it? But you can intimately realize something unexplainable, vast, and ultimately divine is happening to you. You're being transcended. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: And as part of the cooperation helping building foundations to allow that ego to cooperate and not be afraid and not be too confused and not be to be open more open.

Jim Finley: It really is. And I also think this, is that God works with us with infinite wisdom and gentleness. So again, we said this at the beginning too, at the series, the very fact that people are drawn to listen to this. It means they're already on the path of it. And it's a state of increasing ambivalence between means and ends, that at the end, is this unexplainable union. But the unexplainable union that lies ahead of us starts unexplainably welling up in the ground beneath our feet. That is the very where we are on the path towards it. The hidden center is welling up out of the ordinariness.

Jim Finley: I also think in daily life, by the way, you can be taken by unexplainably precious, ordinary loving human interactions are. The simplest of acts to your awakened heart see that it's ultimately God's the infinity of that. And that intimacy is the intimate immediacy of God. You don't announce it at the dinner table because people look at you funny, you keep it to yourself, but there is a way of realizing the divinity of the ordinariness as an habitual state. And it heightened your sensitivity than the ordinariness to the suffering within yourself and others to the gift of everyone to nature like that. I think that's the growth of it.

Kirsten Oates: I'm wanting to support the divinity.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: And you would support it. Martin Heidegger has this saying about letting each thing rest in its own way to be, not imposing your will on it. He said, "This could look like not caring, but it's the opposite. Could this be the hardest thing of all to let each thing rest in its own way to be? That is each person is as we are an utterly unique manifestation of the infinite mystery of God. And we walk with them and their way to be who they are with all their

growing edges, just as with God's help we walk with ours." So it's really a contemplative foundations of community, I think. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. Well, all my questions covered. It's very clear. I'm knowing in the unknowing.

Jim Finley: I can tell it.

Kirsten Oates: Understanding in the non-understanding.

Jim Finley: I can tell.

Kirsten Oates: Can I be confused in confusion or is that I'm missing something there?

Jim Finley: Yeah, you can be confused. Someone once said, "To be with the spiritual teacher, is to be with someone who's perhaps as confused or more confused than you are, but they're not confused by the confusion because they know it's just confusion." We get confused by confusion because we believe the confusion has the authority to name who we are.

Kirsten Oates: Wow. Yeah.

Jim Finley: And that's being truly unconfused. You want a new quest? Or I'm confused. What do I know? Seriously, I mean, it's true. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Well, we appreciate you sharing out of your confusion.

Jim Finley: Thank you so much. You're welcome.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for today.

Jim Finley: You're welcome.

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 podcast@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.