

“The Life and Poetry of Rumi”

The Reverend Bill Clark

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**A Sermon by
The Reverend Bill Clark**

A Sufi story tells that one night an angel visited four Sufi masters. She woke them and carried them up to the vault of the seventh heaven and there they saw the very face of the Beloved. Holiness was all around them and it entered and opened wide their heart and souls.

On the return home, the first master lost his mind after having seen so much splendor. Confusion and fear locked him in. He began foaming and frothing at the mouth and walked for the rest of his days in that manner.

The second master was a skeptic. Doubt firmly locked the lid on this heart. He returned and told everyone that he had only dreamt he saw the face of the Beloved. Nothing had really happened.

The third master was a scholar. To everyone he met he talked on and on and on about the face. He gave great lectures about its structure and pigmentation and what it all meant. In this way intellect imprisoned faith and he lost the very experience, which he attempted to describe.

But, the fourth master was a poet. When he returned home he sat in the chair by the window and took pen and paper and began to write. He wrote song after song of praise to the universe. He praised the song of the morning dove and his little daughter sleeping in the cradle. He praised the glorious light of the stars in the sky and coolness of the dark. In this way, day-by-day, his heart remained open and he led a life that was much improved.

In this hour we gather to honor and celebrate the writings and praise of the poet. The poet, whose words and phrases give us images of awe and wonder. The poet, whose thoughts and feelings communicate to us catacombs of love. The poet, whose message warms the heart.

Reading: Eating Poetry: Clark

Jalaluddin Rumi has been described as the greatest mystic poet of Islam and perhaps of the world. Born in the year 1207 in what is now war-torn

Afghanistan, Rumi explored in his writings, poetry and life, all of the aspects of the extreme, gorgeous drama of the soul's journey to God. The journey of self-discovery and knowledge. The journey towards the quest to know God.

Reading: *The Quest:* Kimberly

***By God, Don't Linger:* Kimberly**

Rumi's family background was from a place of honor and distinction. His family lineage can be traced back to Abu Bakr, one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. His father was a famous Sufi Master and theologian called by his contemporaries "The Sultan of Scholars."

Rumi's early life and spirit were seared by the turmoil that dominated the region where he lived. Forced to flee his beloved Balkh where he was born, his family wandered Asia Minor and Arabia for a decade. In central Iran, he met the great Persian mystic Attar who said of Rumi, "This boy will open a gate in the heart of love and throw a flame into the heart of all mystics lovers." His continual search for union with the divine eventually brought him to meet his soul's beloved teacher Shams of Tabriz in 1244. Rumi described the meaning of this all transforming encounter:

(Clark)

"I was raw, then I was cooked, then I was ash."

I have seen the king with a face of Glory,

He who is the eye and the sun of heaven,

He who is the companion and healer of all beings,

He who is the soul and the universe that births souls.

Rumi's son later wrote of his father's encounter with Shams, "After meeting Shams, my father danced all day and sang all night. He had been a scholar....he became a poet; he had been an ascetic, he became drunk with love."

This metaphor of drunkenness repeats itself throughout much of Rumi's poetry. The love of the Divine, the Beloved is said to leave one ecstatic, unconscious, dancing, singing and whirling drunk with love.

Reading: The lover is ever drunk with love.....(Kimberly) Music

Reading: Our drunkenness does not come.... Clark (Music stops @ "without music")

Sufis are known as the mystics of Islam. The awakened ones. Where every upright Muslim expects to see God after death, the Sufis are the

impatient ones. They want God now....moment by moment, day by day, in this very life. **“As long as there is life in this body, I am here to serve you.”**

A Sufi remains awakened to this possibility of a holy encounter with God. In Islam it is said there are seventy thousand veils between ourselves and God. The aim of Sufism is the elimination of all veils between the individual and God. The elimination of dualism till there is only one....the Beloved.

Readings: I know nothing of two worlds... (Kimberly)

In calling God their Beloved, Sufis are people who prefer God to everything and it is said God prefers them to everything else. Sufism has been often referred to as the Unitarians of Islam. As the Sufi way is not a path of retreat from the world but a way of seeking the Divine while still actively engaged in the world. As the mystics of Islam the Sufi foundation includes the outer forms of religious practice as well as a life based on moral and ethical principles. Sound familiar!

Rumi’s life and poetry reflected such practice and principles. In the opening words we heard his cry of the one great purpose for all human beings. That aim and purpose, I believe is to know and love God. One cannot know and love God till one knows the worth and value of ones own soul.

Reading: Your Worth: (Clark)

As ones soul is awakened and filled with the light of the beloved, the heart is opened wide and overflows with ecstasy, abandonment, astonishment and drunk on love.

Reading: Can Anyone Describe” (Kimberly)

The poetry and life of Jalauddin Rumi have been a source of spiritual insight and inspiration for centuries. Although stemming from a stark contrasting theological model than our own perhaps, the visual images of the poets phrases often times pierce our own hearts and souls and remove some of the layered veils we have draped between us and our image of the Divine. As we read the ancient words of this Sufi mystic, whether as a Muslim, Christian, Pagan, Jew, Buddhist, Humanist, Agnostic, Unitarian-Universalist, what comes bursting through the pages of these texts is the overwhelming sense of love and joy of a deeply religious and spiritual life. It is not a life reserved only for Sufis, mystics or Muslims. It is a life gifted to all who begin their inward journey on the path of self-discovery and spiritual discipline. As the poet wrote:

“I see His face,
I see His smile,
 There is my joy!
I feel his anger
I feel his heavy hand
 There is my joy!
But what is this?
 He has asked for my head!
My head does not matter...
He has asked me for something,
 There is my joy!

My eyes see only the face of the Beloved.
What a glorious sight,
 For that sight is beloved.
Why speak of two?
The Beloved is in the sight
 And the sight is in the Beloved.

There is a force within that gives you life...
Seek that.
In your body there lies a priceless jewel...
Seek that.
Oh, wandering Sufi,
 If you are in search of the greatest treasure,
 Don't look outside,
Look within, and seek that!
May we all take some time in the coming week to look within and locate
your connection to what is most holy in your lives.
Amen. Blessed Be. Allah be praised.

Benediction: by Rumi

What is not God?
Look around in every direction. Look at the people you know:
The shining beings, the simple souls, the sad, the angry,
The gentle, the kind, the cruel.
Look at the smallest creatures:
Fleas, dust mites, viruses, bacteria.
Look inside yourself:
At your thoughts, feelings, memories, opinions,

Reflections, and dreams, What is not God?
At the center of Sufi prayer, of service and of daily life, one truth resounds,
there is nothing, created or uncreated, that is not God.
In the words of the Prophet Muhammad,
If you walk toward him, He comes to you running.
May your week be one of holy embracing.
May you be filled with loving kindness
May you be well
May you be peaceful and at ease
May you be happy.