

THE THIRD SELF

Sunday, August 27, 2023

Rev. Jimmie Scott

Song Lyrics: "A Song for You"

*I've been so many places in my life and time
I've sung a lot of songs
I've made some bad rhymes
I've acted out my life in stages
With ten thousand people watching*

*But we're alone now
And I'm singing this song to you*

*I know your image of me
Is what I hoped to be
I treated you unkindly
But darling, can't you see?
There's no one more important to me
Baby, can't you see through me?*

*'Cause we're alone now
And I'm singing this song to you*

*You taught me precious secrets
Of a true love withholding nothing
You came out in front when I was hiding
Now I'm so much better
And if my words don't come together
Listen to the melody
'Cause my love is in there hiding*

*I love you in a place
Where there's no space or time
I love you for my life
You're a friend of mine*

*And when my life is over
Remember when we were together
We were alone
And I was singing this song to you*

*I love you in a place
Where there's no space or time
I love you for my life
You're a friend of mine
And when my life is over
Remember when we were together*

*We were alone
And I was singing this song to you
We were alone
And I was singing this song to you*

*We were alone
And I was singing this song
Singing this song to you*

Message

I requested that song ("A Song for You") because ... Well, let me back up. Two or three weeks ago, one of my close female relatives passed in Kentucky. And she's one of the last living elder people in my mother's side of the family. And then, just two weeks later, her sister passed. And it kind of stuck in my heart, so to speak. And it reminded me that I don't say "Thank you" enough. And so I requested this song this morning to say "Thank you" to this congregation; to the other six congregations that I've served over the past almost 40 years now; for the seminary that I served in for five years as the chaplain.

And I'm not going anywhere, I hope! [Laughs with congregants] So I shared that this morning, and some people took it to mean that I'm leaving or retiring. And I've already tried retiring about five times, and that hasn't worked very well for me! [Congregation laughs] Well, that's not on my agenda by any stretch of the imagination! This is simply a way to say, "I love you" and all the people that I've served. [Congregation applauds]

So thank you for allowing me to do that.

So on with the service! In the Bible there are veiled messages about God expressing as three entities. We have what is -- in the Christian faith -- called the Father and the Son and then something that is called the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost. And all of this is reportedly in one "Godhead," which is man's attempt to try to explain how God works in our lives. And theologically it makes sense to me, but if I were a rationalist I don't know how much sense it would make. But it's just a way for me to open up this morning's message that I have for you, called "The Third Self."

As our understanding of this concept has grown down through the years, we've come to understand that this was an antiquated way of people trying to understand what God means in our lives. And to me, it would have been far simpler to say that God is a God of prayer; God is a God of peace; God is a God of order; and to use a Unity term, God is a God of goodness.

The old traditional hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy" -- if you've attended many churches, you've probably heard that song. It references this aspect of our being with these words, and I quote. It says:

*"Lord God Almighty
All Thy works shall praise Thee
All our words shall praise Thy name
In earth and sky and sea
Holy, holy, holy!
Merciful and mighty
God in three persons
Blessed Trinity"*

So spiritually and psychologically, this concept of a third self makes sense to me on so many different levels. It made sense to me far before I even sat in a church. It made sense to me as a young child who often preferred to be by himself and preferred to get lost in books as opposed to being out and playing basketball and doing different things. So it kind of resonates with my spirit.

In Carl Jung's potent book, *The Undiscovered Self*, he said -- and I quote:

"The individual (you, me, all humanity) who is not anchored in God can offer no resistance on his own resources to the physical and moral challenges of the world we live in; for this he needs some kind of

evidence of some type of inner transcendence and experience, which in and of itself can protect him from the otherwise inevitable submersion into mass mindedness."

Now "mass mindedness." I'm kind of a television fan, for good and worse. And sometimes in watching the news and watching some of the insanity that takes place in our nation -- looking at the political turmoil which seems to have increased exponentially over the past 12 to 15 years -- there is a kind of mass fear; a kind of mass anger; a kind of mass opinionated behavior; a kind of almost mass stupidity; a kind of mass violence, in my belief, that's more prevalent today than it's been in the 81 years that I've been on this planet. I just can't recall as much unrest and as much tension and as much fear and as much disorder and as much personal struggle and identity crises and stuff that kind of gets under your skin as is taking place today. And again, maybe that's just me. But I think I have a pretty good read on history for the last 70 or 80 years.

So I find myself sometimes struggling to understand and -- more importantly for me on a personal level - - just trying to stay above it all. And it's an ongoing challenge.

So this morning's message came to me while Mary Oliver's book titled *Upstream*. And in it there's a poem, or more like an essay, titled "The Third Self." And contained in this essay is an anthology called "Blue Pastures," where she describes herself as a vessel of, at a minimum, three selves. One she calls the social self; two she calls the ordinary self; and then three she calls the soul self.

And the soul self, according to her, is that aspect of her being -- or our being -- where we know intuitively that we are whole and complete and lacking nothing, even though that doesn't seem acceptable to the rest of the world at large. And sometimes it doesn't seem acceptable to our own rational thought processes. And so it is at this point of understanding of her soul self that she begins to make peace with her -- what she calls -- quirkiness; her creativity, which she had a massive amount of; her uniqueness; her realness as an authentic spiritual being. Making peace with herself, and then being at peace with the world at large.

And so she lived in sort of a world of anger and a world of political discord and a world of polar opposites and disorder. And so this was her way of experiencing this and then figuring out for herself who she was.

She goes on to tell a story about a time that was particularly painful for her. So right now, I want to read you just a brief version of that. So I want to invite you to just take a deep breath and sit back and listen to the nuances of this brief story. She said:

"Once my father took me ice skating, and then forgot me and went home ... He was later reminded that I had been with him, and was sent back to get me, but this was hours later. I had been found wandering over the ice and taken to the home of a kind woman who slightly knew my family. She had phoned them to say where I was.

When my father came through the door, I thought never had I seen so handsome a man. He talked; he laughed; his movements were smooth and easy; his blue eyes were clear. He had simply, he said, forgotten that I existed.

I can see now what a lifting of burden he had felt in those few hours that I was missing.

Then I put on my coat. We got into the car, and he sat back into the awful prison of himself. The old veils covered his eyes, and he did not say another word all the way home.

From that point forward, I did not think of language as the means of self-description for myself. I thought of it as the door -- a thousand opening doors -- past myself. I thought of it as the means to notice, to contemplate, to praise and, thus, to come into my own personal power."

Coming into one's own personal power, as Schopenhauer has appropriately stated, is kind of like a blind man who came and found a lame man who can see and carries him on his shoulder. It's a moment of transformation that strengthens one man. It's a moment of transformation that strengthens one man and supports the other, thereby creating a symbiotic relationship wherein both feel good about themselves, because both are contributing to something they believe has value. It's one of those situations where instinct overrides the intellect.

So this image, if you will, of one man -- a blind man -- supporting another man -- a lame man who can see ... Carrying another on his shoulder is, to me, an image of that third self. It's a deep, soul image of our relationships one to another, however those relationships unfold. And the writer Erik Tomlin said:

"Things will happen in life that you can't prevent. And sometimes things fall apart that you can't hold together. But ultimately, you are always kind of shaping yourself ... and the final product always speaks volumes about who you really are. Not who or what people say you are, but who you really are, or even what you want to be."

So this going into the soul, if you will, and realizing that -- because we're always becoming -- there is always hope for us. And there's always peace for us. There's always understanding for us. There's always strength for us. There's always power for us when we are willing to open ourselves up to that reality.

So Mary Oliver's brief explanation of the third self can be explained briefly in these, her own, words. She says and I quote:

"We homo sapiens are more than a combination of inner child and pragmatic executor of tasks. There is, instead, in each of us something else ... a powerful kernel of mystery; an extraordinary foil to our ordinary selves. Certainly there is in each of us a self that is neither a child nor a servant of time: a third self, occasional in some of us and then a tyrant in others. This self is out of love with the ordinary; is out of love with time. This self has a hunger and a thirst for eternity."

So I have a question for you this morning: Who do you think you are?

Your answer will speak volumes about how you deal with all the internal and external garbage that we have to filter through on a daily basis. The answer goes beyond our politics; it goes beyond our religion; it goes beyond our gender identities. The answer goes beyond our feelings; our emotions; even beyond our beliefs.

And I think -- I believe -- that this is why faith is such an incredibly powerful experience for each of us. And it's sometimes an irrational experience, but it's also why faith takes us to a different dimension. And it's why the surrender to a Power that is greater than the individual self is so important for us. At the same time, it's kind of scary. And it's scary primarily because we all suffer the illusion that we are in control of our lives. Well, the truth is that life is controlling us! And we literally are living it as it lives itself through us. It's being-ness through us.

So the third self is the place where we go when we need help to be healed from trauma. It's the place where we go when we need to withstand the assorted attacks on our well-being. It's the place we need to go when we need strength of character in what sometimes can feel like a hostile world. It's a place that assists the spirit when we are tired and weary. And it's also a place that challenges us to not give up in the face of adversity. So this third self helps us develop a healthy detachment to the most challenging emotional issues in our lives.

So again, in the Scriptures, the Word says that we human beings are three-fold beings: we are spirit; we are soul; and we are body. And in the Greek language of the New Testament, the word for the soul is psyche. The soul is our personality; it's the thinking aspect of our being. It enables us to reason; to consider; to remember; and wonder. It's how we experience the fullness of our emotions like happiness,

and like love, and like sorrow. It's also how we experience anger and relief and compassion. And it's also the place where we are able to resolve and choose and make decisions.

And so, if these things are true -- and I believe they are -- why in God's name would we ever surrender our autonomy of being to politicians; to institutions; to all of these outer-directed and outer-focused realities that may not necessarily serve our best interests? It's a question I think is worth pondering!

Healing begins with the spirit. Prosperity begins in the spirit. Love begins in the spirit. And all of these, in my humble opinion, are soul qualities that enrich our lives. And for the purpose of this morning's lesson, I'm calling it the third self. This self is both independent and inter-dependent, particularly when it comes to expressing our humanity. And, of course, that's where life always gets complicated: when we start to express our humanity.

So I don't want to spend a lot of time talking about this third self this morning. Other interesting things about Mary Oliver's journey is that, for years, she was an alcoholic. For years, she had to deal with feelings of low self-esteem and low self-worth. For years, she questioned her value as a being. And if there is a normalcy, I think that's pretty much an aspect of everyone who's lived this life. I've been fortunate enough over the past 40 years to work with people from every walk of life imaginable. And I see vestiges of this in our conversations and in our times of prayer and in our times of connecting through counseling.

And we have the capacity within us to, not only rise above it, but live above it. And so that's the challenge I'm issuing to myself this morning, and it's the challenge I want to issue to you.

When I first went to Nashville back in 1984, one of the congregants took me to a little restaurant to hear a songwriter/musician by the name Mose Allison, who became one of my favorite musicians. I love his music. He died a few years ago, but he wrote about 300 little songs -- ditties, I would call them -- in which he was able to express what I believe is the totality of life in just a verse in a song. So I want to leave you with one of them entitled, "I Don't Want Much in This World."

*"I don't want much in this world
It's the simple things I treasure
'Til I die I could get by
On fame, riches and sensual pleasure

I don't ask much in this life
No special consideration
Just treat me like His Majesty
Of a friendly OPEC nation"*

[Congregation laughs]

*"Some people just know when to stop
Some people just won't quit
Until they reach the top

But I'm so easy going
I make my way through life
On love and understanding
From a rich and beautiful wife

Some people just never seem to get enough
They want salvation, paradise
And all that stuff"*

*But I'm so easy going
I don't even keep score
All I want is plenty
But I'll take more!*

*If you ask me, I will take more!
Say please and
I will take more."*

The third self. God bless you!

[Congregants applaud]

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