



First Sunday of Lent, March 6: Kelsey Johnson, Astronomer

For our first installment in the Art of Creation sermon series, astronomer Kelsey Johnson invited us to contemplate that "we are the universe made sentient," and she encouraged us "to learn, to understand, and to dwell in both the precious and precarious realities" of our existence. To enact this understanding, Kelsey suggested developing a creative practice to acknowledge and honor our participation in the beauty and mystery of the universe. How might you engage in a creative practice this week? Or perhaps you could engage in your daily life more creatively – take a different route on your daily walk, try a new spice, listen to a different musical genre, wear mismatched socks. What glimpses of the universe do these practices afford?

Practice: Cultivating Wonder with Glimmers and Glows

Choose a moment from the last week, month, or year that evoked a "glimmer," a small sensation of wonder, curiosity, or awe. In your mind's eye, bring this experience to life with as much detail as possible: Where did this glimmer take place? Who was there and what were they doing? What time of day was it? What sights, smells, sounds, textures, or tastes do you remember? As you remember this glimmer, notice any sensations that arise in your body in the present. Is there a particular part of your body where you feel these sensations the most? Do these sensations have a sense of movement, a texture, a color, a temperature? Do these sensations change or shift as you focus your awareness on them?

Let There Always Be Light (Searching for Dark Matter)

by Rebecca Elson

For this we go out dark nights, searching
For the dimmest stars,
For signs of unseen things:

To weigh us down.
To stop the universe
From rushing on and on
Into its own beyond
Till it exhausts itself and lies down cold,
Its last star going out.

Whatever they turn out to be,
Let there be swarms of them,
Enough for immortality,
Always a star where we can warm ourselves.

Let there even be enough to bring it back
From its own edges,
To bring us all so close that we ignite
The bright spark of resurrection.

Further reading & viewing

The problem of light pollution – and 5 ridiculously easy ways to fix it.
Is the Evening Sky Doomed?
Constellations for Kids: An Easy Guide to Discovering the Sky

Second Sunday of Lent, March 13: Gregory Orr, Poet

Among the many poems Gregory Orr shared with us was “Concerning the Book that is the Body of the Beloved,” which includes these lines: “To be alive: not just the carcass/But the spark./That’s crudely put, but.../If we’re not supposed to dance,/Why all this music?” In this poem and elsewhere, Gregory describes the beloved as anything and everything that connects us to a sense of our vitality and humanity. The beloved is also an imagined compendium of all the stories, songs, plays, and poems from human history that, taken together, express something about what it means to be human. If you were to create your own collection of “the beloved,” what songs, stories, images, or movements would you include? During the rest of Lent, we will be compiling community list to share on the GCRH website. To share your ideas, email them to Emily before Friday, April 15.

Practice: Poetry Reflection

Select a poem and read it aloud twice, noticing any words or images that resonate. Then, imagine that you could enter the landscape of this poem. What plants, animals, people, or objects inhabit this world? Is there a gesture, posture, or movement that captures your experience of this landscape? Consider reading the poem again while making these movements. How do the words and movement amplify, extend, or distract from one another? If you’d like to take this reflection further, consider using a line from this poem as a prompt to create your own poem.

Untitled (This is what was bequeathed to us)

by Gregory Orr

This is what was bequeathed us:
This earth the beloved left
And, leaving,
Left to us.

No other world
But this one:
Willows and the river
And the factory
With its black smokestacks.

No other shore, only this bank
On which the living gather.

No meaning but what we find here.
No purpose but what we make.

That, and the beloved’s clear instructions:
“Turn me into song; sing me awake.”

Further Reading

Shaping Grief with Language
About Gregory Orr

Third Sunday of Lent, March 20: Jake Pugh, My Three Chambered Heart

This week herpetologist Jake Pugh introduced us to the concept of brumation, a period of dormancy during which reptiles conserve energy, often during periods of cold weather or when resources are scarce. As warm weather and longer days arrive, reptiles and mammals alike begin to awaken to the possibilities of new life and growth around them.

Practice: Making Movements of Awakening

When you contemplate the idea of awakening, what physical sensations do you notice? Where do you feel these sensations in your body? As you attend to these sensations, what images, thoughts, or feelings arise? Explore different physical gestures – what kinds of movements can you make that enact or express these feelings? What happens when you repeat these gestures? Do they feel “right”? Do they want to shift or evolve? Does another gesture emerge? Finally, what shapes can you make with your body to express these feelings? How does it feel to assume this shape? Is there a shape that is its opposite? What do you notice when you move back and forth between these shapes? Using these prompts, dance your own dance of awakening.

Cutting Greens

by Lucille Clifton

curling them around
i hold their bodies in obscene embrace
thinking of everything but kinship.
collards and kale
strain against each strange other
away from my kissmaking hand and
the iron bedpot.
the pot is black,
the cutting board is black,
my hand,
and just for a minute
the greens roll black under the knife,
and the kitchen twists dark on its spine
and I taste in my natural appetite
the bond of live things everywhere.

Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 27: Carlehr Swanson, Musician

This week, interspersed with song, musician Carlehr Swanson shared a history of African American gospel music from its origins in the spiritual songs of enslaved peoples to the early gospel music with its roots in the blues to the development of the contemporary mass choir, urban contemporary gospel, and praise and worship music. Throughout her presentation, Carlehr emphasized the integration of the sacred with the secular, demonstrating the relevance of African American gospel music for people throughout history and today.

Practice: Audio Divina

Choose a selection of music to listen to three times. With the first hearing, focus on listening, noticing the sounds of the notes, the silences, and the rests. Observe how these sounds resonate in your own body. On the second hearing, notice any images, emotions, or memories that emerge as you listen. With the third hearing, observe any responses that arise within you. What invitations does this music hold for you today? Respond in whatever way feels comfortable to you – journaling, moving, speaking, singing.

Praise Song for the Day

by Elizabeth Alexander

Each day we go about our business,
walking past each other, catching each other's
eyes or not, about to speak or speaking.

All about us is noise. All about us is
noise and bramble, thorn and din, each
one of our ancestors on our tongues.

Someone is stitching up a hem, darning
a hole in a uniform, patching a tire,
repairing the things in need of repair.

Someone is trying to make music somewhere,
with a pair of wooden spoons on an oil drum,
with cello, boom box, harmonica, voice.

A woman and her son wait for the bus.
A farmer considers the changing sky.
A teacher says, *Take out your pencils. Begin.*

We encounter each other in words, words
spiny or smooth, whispered, or declaimed,
words to consider, reconsider.

We cross dirt roads and highways that mark
the will of some one and then others, who said
I need to see what's on the other side.

I know there's something better down the road.
We need to find a place where we are safe.
We walk into that which we cannot yet see.

Say it plain: that many have died for this day.
Sing the names of the dead who brought us here,
who laid the train tracks, raised the bridges,

picked the cotton and the lettuce, built
brick by brick the glittering edifices
they would then keep clean and work inside of.

Praise song for struggle, praise song for the day.
Praise song for every hand-lettered sign,
The figuring-it-out at kitchen tables.

Some live by *love thy neighbor as thyself*,
others by *first do no harm or take no more
than you need*. What if the mightiest word is love?

Love beyond marital, filial, national,
love that casts a widening pool of light,
love with no need of pre-empt grievance.

In today's sharp sparkle, this winter air,
any thing can be made, any sentence begun.

On the brink, on the brim, on the cusp,
praise song for walking forward in that light.

Further Listening

The Frost Gospel Ensemble

Fifth Sunday of Lent, April 3: Ézé Amos, Photography

In our final installment of the Art of Creation series, Ézé Amos showed photographs from his street photography project, *Cville People Everyday*, and from his documentation of local resistance actions over the past few years. Rather than posing his subjects, Ézé tries to capture them in more spontaneous attitudes. He also selects subjects and perspectives that are overlooked to contribute to a more complex picture of the city of Charlottesville. As a part of his creative process, Ézé works to cultivate a sense of being fully present in the moment when he photographs someone.

Practice: Storytelling with Images

Visual art has the potential to evoke different kinds of responses that can stimulate new areas for reflection and contemplation. Select an image that offers many possibilities for rich description. (For this practice, you might find photographs in the Photography section at the Art Institute of Chicago or the Museum of Modern Art's online collection of photographs.) Make a list of as many details as you can. What shapes, colors, textures do you see? What sounds or movements can you imagine? What sense of atmosphere or emotional tone does the image suggest? Review your list of descriptions, and free-write about any associations or memories that arise. Finally, craft a three-sentence story from your writings. What elements are most essential to you? Can you articulate a beginning, middle, and end? What messages does this story hold for you today?

A Fierce Desire to Stay: Looking at West Virginia Through Its People's Eyes (excerpts)

by Doug Van Gundy

These mountains have stopped
swallowing men & spitting
them back out
bruised by what
they've seen & done.

The men are gone
litany of used-
to-be.

I believe
in the body, not its resurrection.
while I want to die
quickly, I want my body to linger as long as it can.

Make certain it's safe enough, deep enough,
square enough to hold my eternity.

People are real friendly, but they'll leave you alone, you know?
There is no way you can bury me
without entering the earth yourself.