5th Annual Poetry Sunday
November 8, 2026
Poems

No Thank You
Shel Silverstein
Read by Joan Lund

No I do not want a kitten,
No cute, cuddly kitty-poo,
No more long hair in my cornflakes,
No more midnight meowing mews.

No more scratchin', snarlin', spitters,
No more sofas clawed to shreds,
No more smell of kitty litter,
No more mousies in my bed.

No I will not take that kitten---
I've had lice and I've had fleas,
I've been scratched and sprayed and bitten,
I've developed allergies.

If you've got an ape, I'll take him,
If you have a lion, that's fine,
If you brought some walking bacon,
Leave him here, I'll treat him kind.

I have room for mice and gerbils,
I have beds for boars and bats,
But please, please take away that kitten---
Quick---'fore it becomes a cat.
Well…it is kind of cute at that.

The Toy Eater
Shel Silverstein
Read by Joan Lund

You don't have to pick up your toys, okay?
You can leave 'em right there on the floor,
So tonight when the Terrible Toy-Eatin' Tookle
Comes tiptoein' in through the crack in the door,
He'll crunch all your soldiers, he'll munch on your trucks,
He'll chew your poor puppets to shreds,
He'll swallow your Big Wheel and slurp up your paints
And bite off your dear dollies' heads.
Then he'll wipe off his lips with the sails of your ship,
And making a burping noise,
He'll slither away---but hey, that's okay,
You don't have to pick up your toys.

I Want to Be Reincarnated as Gloria Steinem
Wilma Mankiller
Read by Sue Mitchel

If I am ever reincarnated
I want to come back as
Gloria Steinem

so I can have a sharp mind
a quick wit
and a faith in people
That never wavers or doubts

so I can be a sister to
all things in the creation
women, men, children
plants, animals, the stars,
water and the wind

so I can face all life's
burdens squarely and
dance anyway

so I can work tirelessly for a just

society and find something
to laugh about every day

so I can be one of the most
important women of the century
and remain genuinely humble and
despite everything
still express love unconditionally

I want to be reincarnated as
Gloria Steinem

so I can live
A full, joyful life with few regrets
Except perhaps not going to the
beach a little more

Each and All
Ralph Waldo Emerson
Read by Gery Morey

Little thinks, in the field, yon red-cloaked clown
Of thee from the hill-top looking down;
The heifer that lows in the upland farm,
Far-heard, lows not thine ear to charm;
The sexton, tolling his bell at noon,
Deems not that great Napoleon
Stops his horse, and lists with delight,
Whilst his files sweep round yon Alpine height;
Nor knowest thou what argument
Thy life to thy neighbor's creed has lent.
All are needed by each one;
Nothing is fair or good alone.
I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,
Singing at dawn on the alder bough;
I brought him home, in his nest, at even;
He sings the song, but it pleases not now;
For I did not bring home and river and sky;
He sang to my ear,---they sang to my eye.
The delicate shells lay on the shore;
The bubbles of the latest wave
Fresh pearls to their enamel gave,
And the bellowing of the savage sea
Greeted their safe escape to me.
I wiped away the weeds and foam,
I fetched my sea-born treasures home;
But the poor, unsightly, noisome things
Had left their beauty on the shore,
With the sun and the sand and the wild uproar.
The lover watched his graceful maid,
As 'mid the virgin train she strayed,
Nor knew her beauty's best attire
Was woven still by the snow-white choir.
At last she came to his hermitage,
Like the bird from the woodlands to the cage;
The gay enchantment was undone,
A gentle wife, but fairy none..
Then I said, "I covet truth;
Beauty is unripe childhood's cheat;
I leave it behind with the games of youth."
As I spoke, beneath my feet
The ground-pine curled its pretty wreath,
Running over the club-moss burrs;
I inhaled the violet's breath;
Around me stood the oaks and firs;
Pine cones and acorns lay on the ground;
Over me soared the eternal sky,
Full of light and of deity;
Again I saw, again I heard,
The rolling river, the morning bird;
Beauty through my senses stole;
I yielded myself to the perfect whole.

The Power of Poetry
Brian Bilston
Read by Harriet Blymiller
Poem will be read at service.

Poppies
Mary Oliver
Read by Karen Zindell

The poppies send up their
orange flares; swaying
in the wind, their congregations
are a levitation

of bright dust, of thin
and lacy leaves.
There isn't a place
in this world that doesn't

sooner or later drown
in the indigos of darkness,
but now, for a while,
the roughage

shines like a miracle
as it floats above everything
with its yellow hair.
Of course nothing stops the cold,
black, curved blade
from hooking forward—
of course
loss is the great lesson.

But I also say this: that light
is an invitation
to happiness,
and that happiness,

when it's done right,
is a kind of holiness,
palpable and redemptive.
Inside the bright fields,
touched by their rough and spongy gold,
I am washed and washed
in the river
of earthly delight—

and what are you going to do—
what can you do
about it—
deep, blue night?

The Prairie
Joan Staples
Read by Joan Staples

Why did you bring me here?
So I could stare at the loneliness.
So I could smell the cold
Waiting to eat me
up.

The sod house is my prison.
I'll never escape these
walls.

But you—
you travel.
Your horse takes you
To new places.
You make people laugh.
give them a plan,
a reason for being here,
where the earth is as
unyielding as your silences
and no one knows
when the next storm
will blind us
all.

You have a gift to share.

I have nothing.

Only the memory
of a place where
babies did not die
and friends were not
a day's ride
away.

Where houses had light
and water poured
when you pumped
a spigot.
Where warmth was
family,
and the wind
left you alone at night.

Why did you bring me here?

Agnes
Joan Staples
Read by Joan Staples

I'm tired.
You always want me to entertain,
to smile, to say, "Hello,"
"How is the weather,
Over your way"?
I don't want to talk to anyone.
I just want to lie down.

(Why did you cough so much?
Why couldn't my breath save you?)

You won't let me talk about my baby.
"It's God's will."
Not any God I want to know.

You didn't carry the child,
Feed her with your own body.
You want to forget.
I want to remember:
her quick smile,
the beginning of a laugh,
before the coughing
choked it.

We named her for your mother.
Why won't you let me say her name?

Cul-de-Sac
Andrea Cohen
Read by Al Wileden

Like all tyrants,
my mother made
decrees. The last
straw was the law
that said: no frogs
inside the house.
The lousy universe!
I was seven and ready
to flee with nothing. At
least take a sandwich,
my mother said,
tucking a foil brick
into the kerchief
I'd tied to a stick. I
was a real hobo.
I barely watched her
watch me walk off.
I got all the way
to the cul-de-sac
And sat down to eat.
It was a sandwich
full of grief—
grief and salt,

grief and tomatoes,
grief and cheese.
How far into
far did I go?
How is it
my glass of milk
was still cold
when I got home?

trauma is not sacred
Kai Cheng
Read by Louis Ruiz

violence is not special
pain is not holy
suffering does not make angels
abuse defines no one
you are more than the things that hurt you
you are more than the people you have hurt
do not make an altar to your woundedness
do not make a fetish out of mine
a body belongs to no one
a memory is not made to be eaten
does it titillate you to hear about assault
If i told you my story would you swallow it whole
if i confessed my sins would you feed me to the beasts to purge your own
i will show you mine if you show me yours
we have all seen the darkness now give us the dawn
tell me about the joy you keep in the hollow spaces between your bones
tell me again how you laughed when you realized that you were not wholly unlovable
i'll tell you again how i cried when my best friend told me that I was not a bad person
remember how we used to count the lines on our palms when we were little
how we used to try to read the future for its gifts
how we used to make lists of the things we would dream of when finally we were free
i will make you a list of the things i'm grateful for
i will sing you a litany of reasons to be alive
i want to know the songs you wake up for in the morning
i want to marvel at the unbelievable graciousness of your being
i know that i am capable of pouring love like lavender oil into your cupped palms
there is forgiveness like honey pooled in the chambers of our hearts
you are the thing i am most grateful for
all bodies know how to heal themselves given enough time
all demons carry a map of heaven and their scars
beneath the skin of every history of trauma
there is a love poem waiting deep below

Unity
Jennifer Pratt-Walter
Read by Phyllis Panozzo

Ultimately it will be the small things
that unite us: how sweet this air is
that we are breathing together,
or how magnificent the arch of these maples
shaking their papery leaves.
How beautiful it is that our eyes see the
sun set like treasure into the horizon
day after day. How tenderly the bees tongue the flowers.
How simple it could be for small acts of caring to be spread upon the bread of unity like honey made from
wild clover growing in the lawn of our hearts.

The Summer Day
Mary Oliver
Read by Evelyn Cape

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of
up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and
complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly
washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
How to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through
the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?

Manifesto: The Mad Farmers Liberation Front
Wendell Berry
Read by Kathy Reddy

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophesy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.
Listen to carrion – put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?

Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?

Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is nighest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicos
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

Here Come the Pumpkins
Lula Dovi
Read by Jay Cortright

They come rolling in on trucks,
piled up for marketing
to show their smiling
or their ghoulish faces,
making way for Halloween
with an autumn orange boldly shouted—
offering soup or pie or roasted seeds
for our seasonal savoring.
I've set my cardboard jack-o-lanterns
staring out my windows—
for years now—
grinning a hearty hello
to a top-hatted ceramic look-alike
near the carport.
Sometimes a wasp or lizard
Parks inside that fellow.
Pumpkins all the time.

I Heard a Dog Bark
Lula Dovi
Read by Jay Cortright

I heard a dog bark in the night
And it reminded me of
All the lonely nights of youth and age.

Why does such loneliness insinuate
Itself with that dog's unanswered bark?

Dark of night, dark of heart—
and a dog's barking tells me
loneliness is worse with age.

As lonely too as the whistle of a train—
a freight train that waddled at night
within our hearing
on its way to Port Tampa.

Trains of thoughts now switched to sidings
As lonely as that whistle or that bark.

Like Pharaoh and the Man from La Mancha
Ric Masten
Read by Peggy McNair

recently I have lost two friends
David---the young one succumbed to suicide
and Charles---in his late sixties
lost a long and grueling battle with cancer

here we have David not quite forty
everything going for him and opting out
the determined victim of a bout with melancholy
unwilling to face even one more day
David---reclining on his king-size bed
in lifeless repose
another in the sad procession

of young defeated Pharaohs

and then Charles grayed and grizzled
the man from La Mancha
painfully forcing himself
to rise from his sick-bed each morning
and tilt with extinction
Charles---ferociously clinging to breath
wringing it out for every
precious moment he could get
stubbornly doing this
until unhorsed at last
he went down

Charles and David
David and Charles
together in death
if only they had met in life
And traded places

How to Be Hopeful
Barbara Kingsolver
Read by Nancy Wileden

Look, you might as well know,
This device is going to take endless repair:
Rubber cement, rubber bands, tapioca,
the square of the hypotenuse,
nineteenth-century novels, sunrise-
any of these could be useful. Also feathers.
The ignition is tricky. Sometimes
You have to stand on an incline
where things look possible. Or a line
you drew yourself. Or the grocery line,
making faces at a toddler, secretly,
over his mother's shoulder.
You may have to pop the clutch
And run past the evidence. Past everyone
who is praying for you. Passing
All previous records is ok, or passing
strange. Just not passing it up.
Or park it and fly by the seat of your pants.
With nothing in the bank, you will
Still want to take the express. Tiptoe
Past the dogs of the apocalypse
asleep in the shade of your future.
Pay at the window. You'll be surprised:
You can pass off hope like a bad check.

You still have time, that's the thing.
To make it good.

Peace Will Come
Tom Paxton
Read by Mary Satterwhite

Peace,
Peace will,
Peace will come,
And let it begin with me.
We,
We need,
We need peace,
And let it begin with me.
Oh, my own life
Is all I can hope to control.
Oh, let my life,
Be lived for the good,
Good of my soul.
Let it bring peace,
Sweet peace,
Peace will come,
And let it begin with me.