**Grieving**

Grief is a natural part of the human experience. All people grieve, though in different ways and at different times throughout their lives. Even Jesus wept at the loss of his friend, Lazarus. Grief is a complicated spiritual, psychological and philosophical process. Grief doesn’t really end, but over time (sometimes a lot of time) the deep emotions of grief usually become transformed into feelings of appreciation, gratitude, acceptance and hope. Today’s session invites you to explore how you have or are experiencing grief, through one of Mary Oliver’s poems.

**Please see the next page for the poem.**

**Questions for Reflection**

1. Do you identify with the ways Mary Oliver speaks about grief? Do any of her images strike you as particularly true or helpful?
2. Is there a particular situation that you are grieving at this time that you would like to share with the group?
3. At one point, she writes that it’s “not the weight you carry, by how you carry it,” suggesting that grief doesn’t have to be “let go of” but rather can be embraced and carried gracefully. Has that been your experience or not?
4. As a culture we often deny the legitimacy of grief – we fail to allow, encourage, or honor its natural place in human life. How do you think we as a society could make grief easier, more manageable, more acceptable?

**Prayer**

*From the burial service in the Book of Common Prayer (p.505)*.

Grant, O Lord, to all who are bereaved the spirit of faith and courage. That they may have strength to meet the days to come with steadfastness and patience; not sorrowing as those without hope, but in thankful remembrance of your great goodness, and in the joyful expectation of eternal life with those they love. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

**Heavy**

By Mary Oliver

That time

I thought I could not

go any closer to grief

without dying

I went closer,

and I did not die.

Surely God

had His hands in this,

as well as friends.

Still, I was bent

and my laughter,

as the poet said,

was nowhere to be found.

Then said my friend Daniel

(brave even among lions),

"It's not the weight you carry

but how you carry it -

books, bricks, grief -

it's all in the way

you embrace it, balance it, carry it

when you cannot and would not,

put it down."

So I went practicing.

Have you noticed?

Have you heard

the laughter

that comes, now and again,

out of my startled mouth?

How I linger

to admire, admire, admire

the things of this world

that are kind, and maybe

also troubled -

roses in the wind,

the sea geese on the steep waves,

a love

to which there is no reply?