

James Finely interned for a year at a VA hospital as part of his doctoral program in psychology. One rotation was spent in an inpatient alcohol treatment unit. Most of the patients met the criteria for the dual diagnosis of PTSD and alcohol abuse and dependency.

His first morning on the unit, Finely was told that some years earlier the patients had devised an initiation rite for those seeking admission to the unit. Because this invitation rite had been handed down as a secret oral tradition, Finely did not know anything about what he was to witness.

All the patients in the unit were sitting in chairs lining the four walls of the room, leaving the large area in the middle of the room empty, except for two chairs facing each other about four feet apart. All the patients were sitting in silence, waiting for the newcomer to be brought in.

The newcomer was instructed to sit on one of the chairs in the middle of the room. A recovering alcoholic sat on the other chair facing the newcomer. All the others sat in silence, looking downward with no eye contact, no smiles, creating a somber atmosphere.

It was in this communal silence that the person leading the initiation rite asked the newcomer, "What do you love the most?" "My wife, he responded." Everyone seated around the four walls of the room yelled as loudly as they could, "Baloney," or something to that effect. The man being questioned nearly jumped out of his seat, startled by the piercing yell. Then everyone looked back down to the floor in somber-faced silence.

The person was again asked, "What do you love the most?" With some trepidation he replied, "My children." Again, everyone yelled, "Baloney." The same question was repeated with the same results until finally the man said, "Alcohol." In that moment, everyone gave him a standing ovation.

He was asked to stand. Then, in complete silence, the others lined up single file and each one embraced the newcomer welcoming him into their midst. As the man was briefly held by each person, tears began to stream down his face. Finely's own eyes filled with tears as he sensed that this was possibly the first time this man had been touched, really touched, in a long, long time.

Christian Wiman was asked by Lauren Winner at a Duke Divinity School event, "What difference does Christianity make to your life as a poet?"

"Well, I would have said for years that poetry was the most important thing in my life and that I arranged everything in my life for the sake of poetry. And I would never say that now. I would say that poetry was a means toward living my life and towards

experiencing God, being with God. And if it's not that, then I would rather not have it. So, it has utterly changed."

"Now, I don't know if I could walk away from it with equanimity. It's still difficult. But my relation to it has utterly changed. The gift, I think that God gave me, I'm quite sure God gave me, was to lift me off the hook that I was on of that kind of ambition to articulate myself in a poem, to fix myself in time, like a rock in the river of time. And I got freed from that. And it is a big deal, it is a big freedom. I hadn't realized how distorted my life was."

Winner observed, "A reordering of loves." Wiman concurred, "Yes, definitely."

Jesus reorders our loves. *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.* Jesus' call was not to love others less, but to love God more.

Jesus reorders our fears. *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.* Sparrows were the poultry of the poor. Two were sold for a penny; two pennies bought a daily ration of bread.

*And even the hairs of your head are counted.* If something as insignificant as a sparrow, as unimportant as a single strand of hair, is known by God, how much more are you? *So do not be afraid.* Jesus' orders us to fear God, in whom we live and move and have our being, more than we fear those who can kill our bodies.

Jesus reorders our status. (In a better translations than the NRSV) *No disciple is more than the master and no servant more than his lord. It is enough for a disciple to be as his teacher and a servant as his lord.* Jesus is the master and the lord, we are the disciples and the servants. We are not more than or less than Jesus. We are like him and like him we are to risk loving God more than our own lives.