

“On the Way—Traveling the Miles of Life”

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First Church in Boston

Music Sunday Homily

May 3, 2026

Throughout the year, we have been exploring the theme of Story as a source of spiritual lessons and insight. In May, we turn to coming-of-age stories, which as it turns out, is deeply resonant with today’s main musical piece, *Frostiana* by Randall Thompson.

In 1914, when Robert Frost first published a volume of poetry in the United States, the composer Randall Thompson was 15 years old. Living in Lawrenceville, NJ where his father was an English teacher at the local elite boys’ school, I think it is reasonable to imagine that Thompson would have been exposed to Frost’s poems as a teen. Of the 7 poems that comprise today’s work, *Frostiana*, four appear in volumes that Frost published between 1914 and 1916 when Thompson was coming-of-age.

Frost’s very first published volume of poetry, *A Boy’s Will*, reflects his own coming-of-age stories in New England. The title is taken from a line in the poem, [*“My Lost Youth,”*](#) by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

*A boy’s will is the wind’s will
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.*

Recollecting his own “long thoughts” from his boyhood in Maine, Longfellow was about 50 when he wrote the poem.

I am struck by these three layers of coming-of-age stories. Longfellow writes a poem reflecting on his own boyhood which becomes the title of Frost’s own recollections on his youth. In turn, these poems are likely read by a young Randall Thompson who, at age 60, turns to them to compose *Frostiana*.

As you will hear in the piece, the poems depict mini stories of life. A girl in a garden. A man in the woods. In each of these, there is the drumbeat of an existential question: *what is it to live?* From the perspective of the young, this is a question of looking forward. *Which path should I take?* From the point of view of middle and older ages, the question begins to look back, *what then has it meant?*

So much of life's meaning *is* found in the stories of everyday moments. Life happens in telephone calls, in hauling manure to the garden, of pausing in the woods on a snowy night, of lingering outside to hear a bird's call or to revel in the starry night.

The music today calls us to notice the meaning we might find along the way as we travel through the many miles of living. Rather than expect one grand answer to explicate the "meaning of life," perhaps we might find instead holy and sacred gifts of living peppered throughout our days.

And I think it is also fair to note that Longfellow, Frost, and Thompson all spent much of their lives in a context of significant privilege as white men with elite educations. Poet Langston Hughes was a near contemporary to Randall Thompson and his recollections of living as a black man in America depict different stories than the poetry of Frost. So also, the feminist, anti-war poet Edna St Vincent Millay, conveyed her own, different point of view in the same era.

Our stories, our experiences, at age 15 or 50, often vary. The ethical and spiritual challenge, I think, is to remain open to listening to the stories of others. Today's music invites us to reflect on some of what it means to travel upon the path of life. As we listen, may we both listen to these stories, and perhaps allow ourselves to reflect upon the places we have been—or may yet go. For life, I believe, is an ongoing journey of cherishing the sacred gift of Life within ourselves and within the lives of people whose stories may be quite different than our own.

So may it be. Ashé. Amen.