

Read the poem 4 times.

To Be of Use

The people I love the best
Jump into work headfirst
Without dallying in the shallows
And swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
The sleek black heads of seals
Bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
Who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
Who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
Who do what needs to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along.
Who are not parlor generals and field deserters
But move in a common rhythm
When the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud,
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphorae for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
But you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
And a person for work that is real.

1. What is the poet saying?
2. Select a phrase or word that speaks to you.
3. How does the poem make you feel? What emotion does it create for you?
4. How does it apply to your chapter?

Marge Piercy