

Kaji Douša: Amen indeed. Good morning Memorial Church.

Congregation: Good morning.

Kaji Douša: It is such a pleasure, and actually it's somewhat intimidating to stand in this pulpit. The last time I was here, Peter Gomes was preaching, and I can't imagine standing in the same space as he did. I bring you greetings from the good people of Park Avenue Christian Church, and also from our friends down the road who added the looks to the Veritas. We are really just so honored to be in Christian community with each other, so thank you for having me. My hope is that you won't regret the invitation. Will you please pray with me?

Kaji Douša: Holy One, source of all being, giver of hope and life, fill us with your truth in this time. Let your word become more crisp and more clear to us, in this time of meditation. And, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you oh God, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Kaji Douša: At the end of a long day, filled with problems I couldn't resolve, my colleagues dropped me off at the corner, with a hug and a wish for luck. I trudged up the stairs and across the bridges, with a glance to the space where folks had been tear-gassed not long before. Grateful that this day was not a day of violence, against a people armed with nothing but their righteousness.

Kaji Douša: The first time I walked across the border alone in my privileged history of walking across the border, not only without incident, but with expedited crossing privileges, I sent a quick text to my husband, who was waiting 20 miles away with my child. Letting them know that I was crossing, and if he didn't hear from me to worry. I meant it as a joke, I think. I think.

Kaji Douša: I turned to look back at the empty plaza that once had been full, just swarming with people, but Grupos Beta and other groups had been effective in their goal of clearing out the area from migrants, who could no longer present themselves without a number that is incredibly difficult to get and illegal by the way. Or an extraordinary set of vulnerable circumstances, and I thought how incredible it was to be so privileged and protected as a US citizen, who doesn't have to worry, I thought.

Kaji Douša: I handed my special card to the agent in this special line, ready to get home in time for my daughter's bedtime, because that had been the deal, you see. My husband was never quite comfortable with my trips down there, concerned for my safety. He was worried about what might happen to me in Tijuana, one of the most dangerous cities in the world. His concerns were about what might happen at the hands of a cartel or some other criminal, so he thought.

Kaji Douša: Back at customs, the agent chatted amicably with me, wondering about my last name Douša, it's Czech by the way. If I had any recommendations on where he might go and Prague, where I have yet to go though my husband, his family are

from there and then something popped up on his screen. He looked at me and maybe a little bit embarrassed even and said, "You'll have to come with me." "Where?" I asked, the first of many unanswered questions that night.

Kaji Douša: As I was pulled into secondary inspection, in and of itself not the biggest deal, I imagine, because most of the people who came in there were in and out. They just answered a few questions and walked back out, but I was required to wait without explanation. Until eventually my interrogators pulled me into a cubicle and asked me their questions.

Kaji Douša: Later, of course, I would learn that I wasn't so special. Just one of many on a Homeland Security list called Operation Secure Line that built dossiers, surveillance and revoked border crossing privileges into Mexico. Subjected 59 journalists, humanitarian workers, lawyers and one pastor to interrogation and intimidation by the most powerful government in the world. Which is why I'm suing them, but that's another matter.

Kaji Douša: I learned about this program, having had no other explanation for my change in treatment at the border, from a whistleblower who approached NBC News with details of the program. I remember seeing the story with a page full of blurred passport sized photos and thinking, "Hmm, I wonder if I'm on that list." Then the call came from one of my parishioners who lives in Tijuana, who I had called initially after my release from the interrogation. She said, "I'm sure you're on there, pastor," and as it turned out, I was, which I confirmed with the NBC reporter, when he sent me my passport photo with the yellow X across my face.

Kaji Douša: Crosshairs as I experienced them, with the inscription SENTRI Revoked, SENTRI being the expedited Southern border crossing program. Just to be clear, my disposition wasn't visa denied or green card revoked. Or a return to Mexico, or any of the other countless ways in which our government is now illegally turning migrants with credible fears away from our gates. No, my story is nothing compared to those.

Kaji Douša: The story behind it is very much something. To place a pastor in the government's crosshairs is significant and it's an escalation, though certainly not unprecedented. So many forget that the concept of the separation of church and state, yes, protected the baby Republic to a certain degree from undue church influence. It also was meant to protect the church as it were from intervention of a state that might not like what it had to say about the gospel. That of course extended across religious traditions, though clearly it was differently applied overtime and creed.

Kaji Douša: Today, I have a first amendment case against the government. I'm also evoking the very same law that so many of my co-religionists have called upon in recent years RFRA or the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. In my dual claim, we are alleging that the government has retaliated against me for my free expression of religion. From my outspoken religious voice, from my free speech period, and

the claim is threefold and we will see if justice carries it to fruition. "Litigation is notoriously unpredictable," my lawyer reminds me.

Kaji Douša: What I want you to know, is that this tamping down against my freedom, is part of a pattern being played out against Black Lives Matter activists, immigration activists and particular in what I believe is a systemic effort to chill our speech and lead us into silence, or else. In the voice of the apostle from our reading today, we hear this very bold claim, "I have finished the race." Let me be clear, this race is nowhere near done for me, I'm too young for that. I'm just beginning to find my place and my voice in ministry. I have only just begun to speak up and out in support of my Christian convictions.

Kaji Douša: It took me a moment, but now as the threats of lynching continue against me, as my church has decided to up its security to include armed guards at each worship service. As we tried to safeguard my family from the people who, whenever my name pops up in the news threatened to end me, I just say, "Please. Please, just let me keep serving Jesus, please." In whatever arguments I find myself in with Paul and those who wrote in his name, I find a point of resonance as we all do in fact, stare down our end.

Kaji Douša: Paul saw the finish line, and he felt a sense of confidence that he had actually finished his part of the race. I have a young child and a husband who love me, and a congregation I just started to serve, and I don't want to see the finish line. They are counting on me not to, but what if it's here? What if this is it? Activists, especially black women, are in a position of increased vulnerability for speaking up and pushing back. I'm far more protected than most, let me be clear.

Kaji Douša: After her brother was murdered by officer Daniel Pantaleo, who just filed suit against the NYPD to get his job back after they finally fired him. Erica Garner, sister of Eric Garner died of a heart attack at the age of 27. Four and a half years after Michael Brown's killing at officer Darren Wilson shots. Six Ferguson activists have died under what those of us who are paying attention consider to be very suspicious circumstances. Then others are dying for no good reason.

Kaji Douša: I think of what happened on October 2nd, when Nebane Abienwi, a man from Cameroon, who was the client of our partner organization [inaudible 00:11:15] died in ICE custody. On September 12th, Roberto Rodriguez-Espinoza, a 37 year old Mexican national, died in ICE custody in Illinois. On July 25th, Pedro Arriago-Santoya, a 44 year old Mexican national died in ICE custody in Georgia. On July 1st, Yimi Alexis Balderramos-Torres, 30 years old, died in ICE custody in Houston.

Kaji Douša: On June 1st, Johana Medina Leon, 25 years old, Joe, a trans woman from El Salvador, died after being in ICE custody without proper treatment. She was the client of another one of our partner organizations, the Santa Fe Dreamers. On May 6th, Simratpal Singh, 21, an Indian national in ICE custody at the La Paz County Jail died in their hands. On April 4th, Abel Reyes-Clemente, 54, a

Mexican national in the custody of US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement at the Florence Service Processing Center died in their hands. At 21 weeks of age, baby Mariee Juarez, died of a needless respiratory infection that she contracted in ICE's willfully negligent custody.

Kaji Douša: I haven't even mentioned the stories of family separation, which include the kidnapping of children at our border and the deportation of caregivers who have lived in the US for years. I haven't mentioned the stories of the babies who had to cope with no care, and who lost their mother's smell. I didn't talk about the babies who had to give up the comforting sound of their fathers voices, because their mothers and their fathers and their aunties, and the people who knew how to hold and to love them, were in a cage somewhere far, far away for no freaking reason, but cruelty itself.

Kaji Douša: Now what? How do we respond to this cruelty? How do we find ourselves written into the solution? How can we stand courageous, when it's all stacked against us? Who are we in the midst of this and here at Memorial Church? Perhaps we look around us to the stories of the saints who are honored in this space.

Kaji Douša: I was just in that room there, and saw the inscription on the wall. While a bright future beckoned, they freely gave their lives and fondest hopes for us and for our allies. That we might learn from them courage and peace, to spend our lives making a better world for others. Of course, I caution us from writing assumptions into people's stories we don't know. One thing that I do think we can learn from them is courage. A path of spending our lives to make this world better. A narrative of sharing our lives and our fondest hopes that something will change.

Kaji Douša: "I was rescued from the lion's mouth," the author writes. In the narrative of Paul, that rescue was only for a moment. After all, those of us who know how the story goes of Paul's life, can read this pastoral epistle with the fore knowledge of what was coming. He himself had crossed all of the borders that they could imagine.

Kaji Douša: He'd been to Seleucia, to Paphos and Antioch and back to Jerusalem. To Tarsus and Lystra and Galicia and Philippi. To Thessalonica and Athens and Corinth, where he stood accused, and back to Jerusalem. To Ephesus and Phoenicia and back to Jerusalem, where they put him in chains again to send him off.

Kaji Douša: He arrived a prisoner in Sidon and Myra and Crete. Shipwrecked in Malta, he received hospitality before traveling to Syracuse, Rhegium and Puteoli before he made the Appian Way to Rome. These tedious details that we tend to overlook in the story, unless we're one of the biblical scholars in the room, are important to pay attention to actually. They foreshadow the stories of the people God is actually calling us to serve today. They echo even some of our own tales. I didn't even include all of the places named in Paul's narrative clearly, but I did list 25

cultural barriers, borders he crossed. Some at considerable risk to say the least. Paul's story is the story of migration as this of course the story of Jesus.

Kaji Douša: We hear that Paul was rescued from the lion's mouth, but we also hear him crying out, presumably alone from a Roman prison after enduring the disappointment of the people who abandoned him. Who followed him when it was easy, but left him on his own when it got hard. What does that mean?

Kaji Douša: Your own Sarah Drummond wrote on this, that Paul felt completely at peace in God's love and comfort. Thus, he is abandoned by the people, but he is not alone. If we want to exegete Paul and the people who spoke in his voice, we do well then to visit people in prison, or people who are crossing borders. I've wanted to understand and to bear witness, so I went to learn from someone who is facing his own persecution at the hands of authorities. For leaving bottles of water in a parched land, and for rescuing migrants from literal points of death.

Kaji Douša: Dr. Scott Warren is on trial again. Since the last time the government tried to prosecute him, it ended with a deadlock jury. For no reason whatsoever, but to make an example of him, and to chill others from doing the same. Again, he's in trouble for leaving water in the desert. Scott's unnecessary retaliatory retrial starts on November 13th, so please do pay attention to this.

Kaji Douša: A group of us plan to go be in trial with him, and after we leave the court, we're going to make our way down to the desert to do our own water drops. If you would like to do this, let me know. Justice show this unjust government, that we won't be stopped by their evil acts from the department of injustice. Scott has done absolutely nothing wrong in the way we would say that Harriet Tubman didn't do something wrong either.

Kaji Douša: When the law is wrong, we have to resist it, and when the administration is illegal, we must impeach. It's just how justice works, and justice rescues the oppressed from the oppressors, while leveling us all up so that we stand on equal footing. How do we get rescued too? A bunch of us in the work aren't sure we'll even make it through middle age. Not to glorify martyrdom, but there are real and true threats, and we might not make it. Somewhere in the cheap popular wisdom that seems to permeate everything, I heard the phrase, as many of you have, live every day as if it were your?

Congregation: Last.

Kaji Douša: Last, right? If you're anything like me, when a phrase catches on with that level of popularity, my first reaction is to roll my eyes. Then, I think about it and I realized that there's a resonance between that pop phrase and Paul.

Kaji Douša: We all know and love and admire Ed Jones, whom I first met 10 years ago, when I was serving a church in Wellesley, with your own Kent French, who of course

then sends his warmest prayers. Kent, Ed, Harry Huff, may he rest in peace, and I went for an adult beverage as one does here in Cambridge, after choral Evensong here in Appleton Chapel. After sitting in those beautiful, darkly stained, antiphonal pews, I was so lifted by the song that I didn't even know what to do with myself.

Kaji Douša: We'd sung the poetry of the psalmists, and we'd proclaimed the power of God. Then we were together, the white men and the black women together, gay and straight, woke or at least awakening and the, I can't figure out how to talk about this in person, in conversation. Now the living and the dead together as Harry has departed from us. I think about Harry, who accompanied me in a cabaret and told me that if I wanted to, I could have a career in singing. Which was actually one of the sweetest things' anyone has ever said to me.

Kaji Douša: Harry, who's touched on ebony and ivory was as gentle and perceptive as anyone who ever lived. Harry to whom the illustrious Peter Gomes, who never actually liked me by the way. Anyway, the illustrious Peter Gomes could give just the slightest glance, and knew just what to do. Harry who loved his Lord and the Fisk organ and the Aeolian-Skinner 793, and the very instrument at which he had his last moments of consciousness, old South's Skinner 308.

Kaji Douša: I think about Harry who taught me more about Jesus and preparedness, than just about anyone. I can't help but call up this phrase, "Stay ready. Stay ready for you know not the day nor the hour." Stay ready, because as Paul talks about, you have this enormous crown of righteousness on your head. Stay ready, because your crown needs maintenance, but first claim your crown as Pastor Otis Moss the III says, "God has given you a crown, but you're going to spend your whole life growing into it."

Kaji Douša: I encourage us to be inspired by the familiar and the powerful. These crowns that aren't of rubies or emeralds, and need no place in the Tower of London, our God given crowns are the crown of justice. I know, what does justice even mean? As Cornel West said, "Justice is love lived in public," and even when we or our neighbors have a pension for building that wall against love, which of course is the impetus between, behind every act of migration, which we demonize for some reason, but that's the point. The rub between what is and what must be, is not anything that you can't help to mend.

Kaji Douša: Words can feel so vacuous when they carry no weight, but you are the weight, your action is the consequence. You can take the concepts of liberty and freedom for some, and turn them into liberation for all. You can connect your liberation to mine and to everyone else's. You can see freedom as, and I'm inspired by Stephanie Paul Saul here, sacredly embodied with bodies that are free to live and love and thrive with abandon. Not just some white bodies or some white heterosis gender, white bodies born into places our policies favor, but every single body can thrive. First, we have to assume and to claim that crown of justice, which carries heavy responsibility.

Kaji Douša:

Make way as you adjust your crown, in the name of Jesus. Amen.