

Anna Burnham:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Anna Burnham:

Welcome to morning prayers at Memorial Church. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the Black Appleton Psalter Book Psalm 77 found on page 39. Please stand as you are able to read responsively by the whole verse.

I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me.

Congregation:

In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted.

Anna Burnham:

I think of God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints.

Congregation:

Thou dost hold my eyelids from closing; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

Anna Burnham:

I consider the days of old. I remember the years long ago.

Congregation:

I commune with my heart in the night. I meditate and search my spirit.

Anna Burnham:

Will the Lord spurn forever and never again be favorable?

Congregation:

Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time?

Anna Burnham:

Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?

Congregation:

And I say, "It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed."

Anna Burnham:

I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord. Yea, I will remember thy wonders of old.

Congregation:

I will meditate on all thy work, and muse on thy mighty deeds.

MUSIC:

Lo! what a glorious sight appears.

To our believing eyes.

The earth and sea are passed away.

The earth and sea are passed away,

And the old rolling skies.

The earth and seas are passed away,

And the old rolling skies.

The earth and seas are passed away.

The earth and seas are passed away,

And the old rolling skies.

The earth and seas are passed away,

And the old rolling skies.

From up in heaven where God resides.

That holy, happy place.

The new Jerusalem comes down.

The new Jerusalem comes down,

Adorned with shining grace.

Adorned with shining grace.

The new Jerusalem comes down,

Adorned with shining grace.

The new Jerusalem comes down.

The new Jerusalem comes down,

Adorned with shining grace.

Adorned with shining grace.

The new Jerusalem comes down,

Adorned with shining grace.

Anna Burnham:

I'm going to do something a little unusual that I super hope I don't get in trouble for. My sacred text is actually a small piece of music about a minute long that I'm going to play. So again, hopefully I don't get in trouble, but ask forgiveness, not permission. This is a piece by Hildegard von Bingen who I will talk about in my address. I'm just going to hold it up to the mic.

MUSIC:

[Latin 00:04:23].

Anna Burnham:

Hopefully that worked well enough. Tomorrow is the feast day of Hildegard von Bingen, who is, I think, simply one of the coolest saints ever. She was an 11th century German Benedictine abbess, which means that she was the leader of a group of Benedictine religious sisters, nuns, living by the rule of Saint Benedict. She was so much more than that and so much more than I even have time to go into here. She was a writer, a theologian, a composer, a mystic, a botanist, a scientist, and a practitioner of medicine. In my tradition, the Catholic Church, she is one of only four women and 37 saints total to be a designated a Doctor of the Church, meaning that a saint's contributions to church history are so profound that they are worthy of a hyper special designation beyond even the very high designation of sainthood, like a super saint.

Hildegard's life and her influence are so profound and so expansive that the subject could fill multiple full sermons worth, let alone a brief morning prayers talk. So I will have to leave you with a teaser of her life and accomplishments. I encourage you to seek out more about this amazing woman yourself, and focus for the time being on one tiny piece of her immense life's work, this piece of music that you just hopefully heard over the speaker. It's part of a larger, longer composition she wrote in honor of Saint Ursula. I'm thrilled to tell you that I have no idea what the Latin is saying. And in fact, part of the point of the delight I find in this music is that I do not care.

I first heard this work by Hildegard this summer when I had the privilege of spending just under a week with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in Erie, Pennsylvania, my home state. I went to their monastery on a retreat, drawn by my love of communities of religious women, my fascination with the rule of Saint Benedict, and the endorsement of a friend from Div school who has spent lots of time in the community.

My first morning there in my small hermitage, just like a remote cabin on stilts high above the trees in the woods outside the Abbey, I was delighted to find no WiFi or TV, and instead, a good old-fashioned boombox with a scattering of CDs, all religious music. Already a fan of Hildegard but not having heard all of her works yet, I was thrilled to see a CD of this longer composition, popped it into the CD player, and was instantly moved, rapt with wonder, stilled to silence. It moved me simply, deeply, and I listened to it the rest of my mornings there, my own small ritual.

There's a phrase we might hear a lot. "If the spirit moves you." I use it in jest often to describe things that are not on the surface at all spiritual or religious. Sarcastically even, like, "If the spirit moves you." But writing this, it came to mind immediately. I think it's a wonderful phrase, one that reminds us to notice what it really is to be moved by the Holy Spirit beyond reason or explanation, to notice simply when we are being moved, and to pay attention to it and be grateful for it.

If you are a member of this church, your more regular encounter with the sacred might, like mine sometimes does, lean towards the intellectual. We translate and retranslate and analyze. We go deep into the history and exegesis of a text. We unpack and we repack, and then unpack again. Such deep looking at something can help us understand a text and better connect with it, of course. But when it came time to write this morning prayers talk, and when I realized my assigned date aligned with Hildegard's feast and that I had this glorious piece of music in my back pocket I really wanted to share with you all, I went to look up the Latin translation so I could include it in the talk and blah, blah, blah. I quickly realized with joy and total relief that I literally did not care what the Latin said. I didn't care what it meant. In fact, I decided that attempting to understand the mystery of how this composition moves me would lead it to move me less. It made me think about joy and being struck by beauty and loving the things we love without maybe having to understand the what or the why fully.

Hildegard herself once wrote, "The word is living, being, spirit, all verdant greening, all creativity." The living word, the Holy Spirit, whatever you might want to call it, is weird and humorous and surprising

and creative I think. It appears in unexpected ways. It swirls through our world and sweeps us up in its path. It is maybe sometimes meant to be a mystery. And the joy to which the spirit moves us is sacred and worthy of our attention and gratitude. And so I suppose today I encourage us all to simply notice the mystery of what moves us, to love the unknowable therein, to delight in it, and to name not just the thing, but the very movement and the spark of the spirit itself as something holy.

Please pray with me. Holy God, living spirit, Hildegard von Bingen once wrote that like billowing clouds, like the incessant gurgle of the brook, the longing of the spirit can never be stilled. Help us notice the longing of our spirits and find delight in it. Help us notice the creativity of the Holy Spirit in our own lives. Help us be moved. Like Hildegard, may we seek you in the beauty of this world. For our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Amen.

And together let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying, Our Father.

Congregation:

Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us to temptation. Deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Anna Burnham:

Together let us sing the hymn, Heaven and Earth and Sea and Air, number 45 found in the Crimson Harbor Hymnal.

MUSIC:

Heaven and earth and sea and air,
All their Maker's praise declare;
Awake, my soul, awake and sing:
Now thy grateful praises bring.
See the glorious orb of day
Breaking through the clouds his way;
Moon and stars with silvery light
Praise him through the silent night.
See how he hath everywhere
Made this earth so rich and fair;
Hill and vale and fruitful land,
All things living, show his hand.
Lord, great wonders workest thou.
To thy sway all creatures bow;
Write thou deeply in my heart
What I am, and what thou art.

Anna Burnham:

This benediction is a prayer written by Hildegard. "Fire of the spirit, life of the lives of creatures, spiral of sanctity, bond of all natures, glow of charity, lights of clarity, taste of sweetness to sinners, be with us and hear us today. Composer of all things, light of all the risen, key of salvation, release from the dark prison. Hope of all unions, scope of chastities, joy and the glory, strong honor, be with us and hear us today." And together, let us say.

Congregation:

Amen.