

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. Our speaker today, we're blessed to have Claire. Thank you for coming again. Please stand, all who are able, for our responsive reading this morning, found in your black Psalter, Psalm 24. "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for He has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers."

Congregation:

"For He has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers."

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

"Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully."

Congregation:

"Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully."

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

"They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation. Such is the company of those who seek Him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob."

Congregation:

"Such is the company of those who seek Him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob."

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

"Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors! That the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle."

Congregation:

"Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle."

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

"Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors! That the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory."

Congregation:

"Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory."

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing).

Claire Neid:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Claire Neid:

This is a poem by Mary Oliver called About Angels and About Trees. "Where do angels fly in the firmament, and how many can dance on the head of a pin? Well, I don't care about that pin dance, what I know is that they rest, sometimes, in the tops of the trees and you can see them, or almost see them, or, anyway, think: what a wonderful idea. I have lost as you and others have possibly lost a beloved one, and wonder, where are they now? The trees, anyway, are miraculous, full of angels, ideas, even empty they are a good place to look, to put the heart at rest. All those leaves, breathing the air, so peaceful and diligent, and certainly ready to be the resting place of strange, winged creatures that we, in this world, have loved."

This past weekend, I attended a conference about religion and urban ecology in Connecticut. The speakers addressed a range of topics from biodiversity loss and Christian ethics, to environmental justice and political campaigns, to ancestral devotion in urban areas and eco theologies for prison abolition. I learned terms like watershed discipleship, and reflected on the question, what values are infused into our built environments? In the days following the conference, I have been mulling over the keynote speaker's presentation, particularly her point that humans are now an urban species. According to her lab's research at the Yale School of the Environment, by 2060, 6.7 billion people will be living in cities and towns across the globe, compared to 4.2 billion people recorded in 2021. This is equivalent to about 1 million people moving into cities every five days. I found this statistic staggering, and I walked away trying to imagine how cities will transform in the coming decades to accommodate the rapid influx of lives and livelihoods.

While I'm not particularly science-minded, I'm in divinity school, after all, I'm aware that the inevitable transformations of urban areas across the globe in my lifetime require more than just the attention and work of geographers, engineers, governments, ecologists, scientists, and public health officials. The changes that are occurring to our landscapes, cultural norms, and economies ask us, demand us, even, to examine, evaluate, and shift our relationships with one another and with the natural world. This is not a new statement, and this plea has been made across academic disciplines, religious traditions, and countries as the urgency of climate crises grows. I left the conference feeling particularly compelled by the potentiality of urban ecologies, by the confluence of built and natural environments, by our ecological cohabitation, even in the densest cities. It reminded me of James Bridle's point in their book, Ways of Being that having, quote, "humility before the lively things we build ourselves might result in greater humility toward the beings which already surround us."

I used to complain that Cambridge was too liberal with its use of the term "park". Having had access to large green spaces growing up, and an 800-acre arboretum just steps from my dorm in college, the

pockets of green space I found here paled in comparison. I have become more forgiving of the park since, and I have even found a particular affinity for the small wooded area that abuts the American Academy of Arts and Sciences between Beacon and Irving Streets. Here, among the trees, I find brief respite from the city noise. Under the canopy of lindens, oaks, chestnuts, tulip trees, and more, my heart rests.

Over the summer, I would take daily morning walks from my apartment to sit on one of the benches there, beneath the patchwork of rustling green leaves, and look up to the tippy tops of the trees. With my head tilted back and my face to the sunlight that scattered between branches, I would search for the highest-reaching cluster of leaves dancing in the soft breeze. Gazing at this bundle of leaves, I felt my heart open as wide as the sky is tall, and breathed in the crisp air, rejuvenated, renewed, and reminded of the miracle of each new day and of the enduring grandeur of the trees under which I sat.

I bring Mary Oliver's poem to you this morning because I think it provides a pause for us, as an urban species, to look up to the tippy tops of trees, where angels and winged creatures dance, and invites us to feel the spiritual, creaturely, and ecological worlds we are intertwined with in our urban and natural environments. My hope is that, in the face of staggering statistics, we might turn toward the staggering magnificence of trees and livelihoods around us, and search for our beloveds, our angels, and notice that they too are part of our ecologies. In his book, *The Overstory*, Richard Powers writes that, quote, "There are no individuals in a forest". That, quote, "The bird and the branch it sits in are a joint thing."

With these words in mind, and the curiosity and love in Mary Oliver's poem, I wonder how we might begin to truly understand ourselves as part of the abundance of ecological life in our urban worlds? That, in looking up and looking around us, we can recognize mutuality and interdependence in our growing built environments just as in our natural ones, and continue to move from a place of religionality and reciprocity to all life. Thank you.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

All who're able, please rise for prayer. Let us pray. Oh God, your servant stated that "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." Towns, countrysides, all the way to cities and urban spaces. Oh God, help us to see you around us. Help us, oh God, to see your love in every aspect of life. In your name we pray, amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Now, let us recite the Lord's prayer, saying, "Father, 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 not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. For ever and ever, amen."

Congregation:

"Our Father, 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 not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. For ever and ever, amen."

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Now, let us sing together, hymn number 200, I to the hills will lift my eyes.

Congregation:

(singing).

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

As we leave this place, but never away from God's presence, as you go into the world, may you bask in God's creation, may you look at the trees, the sky, the sun, and all things around you to feel the love of God's creation. Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Blessings be to God.