

SPEAKER: Good morning. Welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for a responsive reading from your black Appleton Psalter, Psalm number 138 on page 69. I praise you with all my heart, sing a hymn to you before the divine being.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

SPEAKER: When I called you answered me. You inspired me with courage.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

SPEAKER: They shall sing of the ways of the Lord. Great is the majesty of the Lord.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

SPEAKER: Though I walk among enemies, you preserve me in the face of my foes. You extend your hand. With your right hand, you deliver me.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

SPEAKER: You may be seated.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

GEETA PRADHAN: Good morning. My reading this morning is a poem by Maulana Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi, a 13th century Persian poet, jurist, Islamic scholar, theologian, and sufi mystic. Rumi wrote some of the most beautiful poems that have become a powerful source of inspiration and made him a loveable poet in America and all over the world.

This poem, titled "Only Breath," speaks to the essence of what we share across all humankind, our oneness, our humanity. "Only Breath," translated by Coleman Barks, a Rumi scholar, who said that Rumi's poetry was about, quote, "trying to get us to feel the vastness of our true identity, like the sense you might get walking into a cathedral." His translation goes as follows.

"Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu, Buddhist, sufi, or zen. Not any religion or cultural system. I am from the East or the West, not out of the ocean or up from the ground, not natural or ethereal, not composed of elements at all. I do not exist, I am not an entity in this world or in the next, did not descend from Adam and Eve or any origin story. My place is placeless, a trace of the traceless. Neither body nor soul. I belong to the beloved, have seen the two worlds as one and that one call to and know, first, last, outer, inner, only that breath breathing human being."

What I'm going to talk about is not anywhere as close as inspiring to Rumi, but it is an experience that guided me and has guided me in my work and who I am as a person. I grew up in the small, beautiful valley of Kashmir at the base of the Himalayas in India and came all the

way to Boston. And this image, this person who has been my guiding light has been with me all through my journey.

So there was this man I knew when I was a little child. He made his living doing work that none of us would ever imagine doing. Day after day he collected human waste in large pots and carried them on his head. We called him jamadar sahib, loosely translated as servant sir. His poverty shown through his tattered clothes but jamadar sahib rose above his menial, demeaning work, his wretched poverty. His job did not define him nor did his economic standing.

He carried on himself, his personhood, a sense of self, of dignity and grace as though forcing you to contend with his humanness. And it was the way he treated people with kindness, compassion, and respect. I was a little child maybe five, six years old but that memory, that humanity came through to me. He dignified himself and his humanity by stripping away any of the differences between who he was and who I was or who anyone around him was. He left an indelible impression on my mind. 50 years later, the memory of his kind eyes and that image still guides me. It pushes me, it challenges me, and in some ways, it disturbs me.

As I've aged and matured I'm disturbed by the image of jamadar sahib. It is both a reminder of all that is good and a growing concern that those ideals of kindness, compassion, respect for human dignity are eroding in our world today. Intolerance, fear of the other, hate, and violence are taking hold, visible starkly in the treatment of those living in poverty, our immigrant friends and neighbors, or those with different religious or ethnic backgrounds or who hold beliefs and value systems that are different from ours.

On the one hand, the world is becoming smaller, more connected and on the other, more complex and more divided. And as these complexities grow, cities, communities, and institutions will have to lead with their values and that is what we are doing at the Cambridge Community Foundation, the organization that I run. At these changing times, I am at once guided by jamadar sahib or servant sir, most appropriately named, serving and shaping my mind, my work, and my attitude towards the world.

A couple of weeks back, this sacred space hosted a concert to benefit the Cambridge Community Foundation's United Legal Defense for Immigrants supporting those undocumented immigrants who have come to our community for refuge, for help, to build a better life and are getting pushed out, separated from their families. And that day, as the divine music rose to fill this beautiful space, the image of the jamadar sahib loomed large in my mind, as did my gratitude for what he had taught me about being a good human being. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Please join me in offering the Lord's Prayer, printed on the reverse of your order of worship. "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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Please stand as you are able and join in singing hymn number 331 in your Memorial Church hymnal. Your Love is Kind and Suffers Long, number 331.

[MUSIC PLAYING - "YOUR LOVE IS KIND AND SUFFERS LONG"]

SPEAKER: May we live this day compassionate of heart, clear in word, gracious in awareness, courageous in thought, generous in love. Amen.

[ORGAN PLAYING]