

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Welcome to morning prayers. All who able, please rise for our responsive reading found in your psalter, Psalm 133. Today we are grateful to welcome our speaker, Professor Stein. Psalm 133, "How good and pleasant it is that brothers dwell together. It is like fine oil on the head running down unto the beard. The beard of Aaron that comes down over the collar of Israel. Like the dew of Hermon that falls upon the mountains of Zion. There the Lord ordained blessing everlasting life."

You may be seated.

Congregation:

(singing).

Michael Stein:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Michael Stein:

My inspired text is by Jonathan Sacks, writing as chief rabbi of the United Kingdom in the Three Stages of Creation. To see that someone is good and to say so is a creative act. One of the great creative acts. There may be a few individuals who are inescapably evil, but they are few. Within almost all of us is something positive and unique, but which is all too easily injured and which only grows when exposed to the sunlight of someone else's recognition and praise. To see the good in others and let them see themselves in the mirror of our regard is to help someone grow to become the best they can be.

I have been extremely fortunate to have spent my professional career as a global disability rights advocate. Some consider me among the better-known ones. The past 20 years have focused on drafting and then implementing a United Nations disability human rights treaty, and I have been very privileged to have worked in well over 40 countries, traveling over 2 million miles, stripping away the formal legal aspects. It strikes me that disability rights, as well as human rights more generally are about getting countries, societies, governments, and communities to recognize the humanity of all people with and without disabilities and to acknowledge the godliness that exists and should be respected in each and every person.

It also strikes me that what unites us as humans so very much eclipses what divides us. Intellectually, I know that as humans we share 99% of our genetic material. Anecdotically, I have been embraced and graced with kindness around the world by people who have very little and yet who give very freely of themselves. It's very clear to me that people all like food, music, feeling safe, their families and friends being appreciated, and spiritually, I truly believe that we are all children of God. So I've been troubled and saddened by the world's turn over the last decade or so towards nationalism, tribalism, ableism,

whatever it is that we care to call it. It's nasty and divisive and dehumanizing, and it promotes seeing each other as other rather than as common bearers of the divine spark of God's beauty.

So how do we embrace truth and justice and shared humanity? How do we inspire the seeing of the divine, of the good in each other, in the face of these circumstances? It seems to me that faith offers both consolation and guidance, linking my thoughts with those of Lord Sacks. I'm reminded of the reading of Abraham at Mamre, sitting under the oak trees in the hot desert when three strangers approach. We do not know yet that there are angels bringing the good news of Sarah's pregnancy, and yet Abraham is neither defensive nor suspicious. "Who are you? Where are you going? What do you want?"

Instead, the text tells us that he sees God, *vayar Adonai*. He sees God. We know that he did not see God literally from other portions of the Torah and of the scripture. We know that God informs Moses that no one, no human can literally see God. So I received the text as Abraham seeing the divine in them. So in the heat of the day, not knowing who they are, he rushes out, he feeds them, cares for them, shelters them without any promise or reason. Other than that, he has seen the goodness, the divine within them and recognizes his own humanity and goodness and divine. It seems to me that this is the way forward to engage others with open arms and open minds and open hearts; first, to embrace the beautiful, to see ourselves and the godliness that exists in everyone.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

All who are able, please rise for prayer. Loving God, you call us to not look at our neighbors as strangers or as the other, but God, you call us to see them as your children; that we all are children of God. Help us to seed the divinity in each person. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Now let us say the Lord's Prayer together. 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 the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, ever. Amen. Now let us sing together, hymn number 143, found in your hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing).

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

As we leave this place, but never away from God's presence. As we continue to journey with Christ during this season of Lent, may we remember that we are all children of God. Go in peace. Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.