

Steph Grossano:

Good morning. And welcome to morning prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Becca Leviss. Please rise in body or spirit as we begin with a reading of Psalm 8.

Oh, Lord, our Lord. How majestic is your name throughout the earth. You have covered the heavens with your splendor.

Congregation:

From the mouths of infants and sucklings you have founded strength on the account of your foes, to put and end to enemy and avenger.

Steph Grossano:

When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, and the stars that you set in place.

Congregation:

What is man, that you have been mindful of him, mortal man that you have taken note of him.

Steph Grossano:

That you have made little less than divine and adorned him with glory and majesty.

Congregation:

You have made him the master over your handiwork, laying the world at his feet.

Steph Grossano:

Sheep and oxen, all of them, the wild beasts too.

Congregation:

The birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, whatever travels the paths of the seas.

Steph Grossano:

Oh Lord, our Lord. How majestic is your name throughout the earth?

Becca Leviss:

Good morning. Prospective immigrants, please note, by Adrian Rich. Either you'll go through this door or you will not go through. If you go through, there is always the risk of remembering your name. Things look at you doubly and you must look back and let them happen. If you do not go through, it is possible to live worthily, to maintain your attitudes, to hold your position, to die bravely, but much will blind you, much will evade you. At what cost? Who knows? The door itself makes no promises. It is only a door.

Growing up, this was my favorite reading from the Mishkan T'filah, the prayer book we use in synagogue. I would sit in services and thumb through until I found this poem and I would read it over and over and over again. I had this obsession with choosing the right path. And when I say right, I don't mean what society thought was right or what my parents thought was right. I had this fantasy that if I chose the right college, the right job, the right dorm room, that the rest of my life would somehow fall perfectly and magically into place.

It is no surprise that the world, that life, does not work that way. As it turns out, there's about a gazillion alternate lives I could lead. Could have moved to Spain after graduating from college instead of going to DC. Could have stayed in DC instead of leaving for Harvard Divinity School, and all of these lives would've had beauty and ugliness, happiness and hurt, black and white and a million shades of gray. They would be equally wonderful, just different. And that doesn't mean that I chose wrong.

In Hebrew, the word mezuzah literally means doorpost, but it also refers to an object, a mezuzah. Sort of a thin hollow box. And inside is sealed a small scroll of parchment upon which is written some of the most sacred prayers in Judaism. Jews are commanded to hang mezuzot, the plural of mezuzah, on doorposts of home entrances, inside and out. We're told that everything but bathrooms and closets should have mezuzot on the doorpost. And the mezuzah serves two purposes.

First, it blesses and protects those who walk through and dwell inside. You might notice that some Jews will kiss and touch their fingertips to a mezuzah as they walk through the doorway, but it also reminds us that our faith is not confined to one room or one building. With every exit and entrance, we engage in something sacred.

The root of mezuzah is three letters, Zion [inaudible 00:09:04] Zion, and it means to move while the door stays in space. Inherent in its conception is this idea of movement. We move past some doors and around others, turn around in a circle, go forward, go back, stumble through. We pick a door knowing that whichever we choose, we'll have pain and pleasure, sorrow and joy. We pick a door knowing that to be human is to move through shifting shades of gray, questioning ourselves, each other, the paths we're on. We pick a door knowing that, especially at this moment of crisis, when social media, infographics, and government officials alike, try to simplify centuries of oppression, marginalization, and violence into disparate terms of black and white. That it is our mandate, whichever doors we choose, that we do so with intentionality, accountability, and with peace as our highest priority. We pick a door knowing that there will almost always be more doors, and knowing that there is something profoundly holy in that.

I moved to Cambridge a little over two months ago, and I think I lost my mezuzah in the cardboard boxes of my move. I didn't really think about it until now, but I'm going to get a new one. I figure I could use some of these reminders. If you are able, I'd like you to rise and join me in prayer. There's a blessing that Jews say when we hang on mezuzah. I'm going to share it with you first, and then I'll lead us on prayer for all of us.

We say [foreign language 00:10:57] blessed are you Adonai, our God, who has commanded us to hang the mezuzah, who has instructed us to mark our comings and goings with extra sparks of sacred. And for all of us, may we notice and value the holiness in every doorway, every entrance and exit, even those we do not choose. And may we move through every one of them with dignity, integrity, kindness, and love. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Steph Grossano:

Please join me in praying the Lord's prayer.

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 trespasses

against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Steph Grossano:

And let us sing hymn 3:36. In your crimson, Harvard email.

As we go into this day, may we remember that in the goodness of God, we were born into this world. By the grace of God, we've been kept all the day long, even unto this very hour. And by the love of God, we are being made whole. Go in peace. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.