

Prof. Stephanie Paulsell: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

Prof. Paulsell: Welcome to morning prayers. Would you stand for the responsive reading? Number 27 in the black Appleton Chapel Psalter. The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Congregation: When evildoers assail me, uttering slanders against me, my adversaries and foes, they shall stumble and fall.

Prof. Paulsell: Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

Congregation: One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

Prof. Paulsell: For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent, he will set me high upon a rock.

Congregation: Give me not up to the will of my adversaries for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.

Prof. Paulsell: I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Congregation: Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the Lord.

Congregation: (singing)

Prof. Paulsell: A reading from the Gospel According to John. "Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"

John Wilson Jr.: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

Wilson: This text clarifies a higher next level of existence, but sometimes we need help getting there. Mine came one day from my grandmother, Ida Anita Nix. Between finishing Morehouse College and starting graduate study here, I got a job on Martha's Vineyard Island, and I stayed with her in her modest Oak Bluffs home. All that summer, I biked 16 miles up-island to work a bakery cash

register, 6:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. No easy ride. One day, I got home truly exhausted. I needed to eat, but nothing was in sight. Never big on food, Gram had mothered five, but retained an athletic frame. By her death in 2001 at age 99, she had spent a lifetime at her teenage weight and fitness. For her, eating was not the point of living. It merely energized you for the point of living. A meal was a vehicle, never an event. Yet I relied on her cooking, because it was suicidal to rely on mine.

Wilson: That day, I remember walking in, saying, "Gram, I'm hungry." Without even a backward glance from that couch, she said, "You're not hungry." I said, "No, Gram, the ride was hard today. I'm hungry." She said, "No, it's not even logical for you to be hungry. You're thirsty. Drink water." So, with a little attitude, I got a glass of water, I waited a minute, I looked over and said, "Still hungry." She said, "Well, drink another one." Frustrated, I poured and quietly moved to the table.

Wilson: After a while, she broke the silence saying, "Most people don't know a hunger signal from a thirst signal. They assume they're hungry. They overeat, and literally make their bodies pull the needed mortar out of food, or draw it out of alcohol or sugary drinks. They do that for years. They get big, they get sick, and die younger than they have to. They never listen." she said, "Drink water, son, because it's easier to let your body pull water out of the water. The sooner you realize that, the better off you'll be." Now, see, I knew I was hungry, but my grandmother therapeutically got me listening to my body like never before.

Wilson: The woman in the text holds a deep unmet need too. Married five times, quiet desperation. And as my gram did with me, Jesus bypasses what she thinks she wants, and essentially advises, "Your approach to life will never quench your true thirst." Translated, "You're not hungry. You're unwittingly thirsty for something deeper, something next level." To go next level is to recenter, to elevate to our higher, deeper, better selves, our truer selves. The Book of John's theme is next level. It elevates us from light to true light, from a vine to a true vine, free to free and be, born to born again, and from water to living water. All next level.

Wilson: Harvard University right now is thirsting for her next level. This month marks the 50th anniversary of Harvard's first real diversity surge. When Dr. King was killed in April of '68, Harvard and most majority campuses had just admitted a class. So, in pangs of conscience, they spent a year recruiting in high schools they'd previously avoided, thereby giving those freshman classes of '69 more color than they previously imagined.

Wilson: Fast forward, my office launched in 2018 as Harvard made this next-level declaration. Harvard said, "The intellectual fruits of our diversity do not harvest themselves." So now, we're on a pathway to help ensure that everybody at Harvard thrives, including those from groups previously excluded. President Bacow said of diversity's power, "We can't achieve true excellence by sampling

from only a fraction of the distribution of talent." So, Harvard's next level is to fully harvest our diversity.

Wilson: It's strange how anniversaries can have the power to remind and signal. Last month marked the 400th anniversary of a ship docking in Virginia with 20 captured Africans. Their purchase plunged America to a level from which we've yet to fully elevate. Our next election, ironically held in 2020, the year of perfect vision, may just be our next-level chance to sharpen America's vision, a chance to affirm that our true greatness lies ahead of us and not behind us. Next level.

Wilson: Finally, like Harvard and America, you can go next level too. Starting right now, you can use your time here to finally distinguish your untrue hunger from your true thirst. Imagine a campus that'll incubate more of us to quench our every next-level thirst. Imagine being inspired to teach others, "You're not hungry, you're just next-level thirsty." And that's our grander vision. We believe that if enough of you go next level, then Harvard will truly elevate, and then maybe America, and then maybe the world, and then, amen.

Congregation: Amen.

Wilson: Let us pray. Father, according to your will, usher us to a higher, deeper, truer place. No matter our differences, usher us, each and every one of us, to your next level, where we will finally know love more deeply, where we will finally know truth more undoubtedly, where we will finally know life more abundantly. Usher us to your next level, where we will finally never thirst again. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.

Wilson: Say the Lord's Prayer with me. 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... as we forgive those who trespassed against us.

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 trespassed against us.

Wilson: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Congregation: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Prof. Paulsell: Would you stand for our final hymn, number 45, verse one, the first verse?

Congregation: First verse. (singing)

Prof. Paulsell: And now may the Spirit of God enlighten us, transform us, and lead us into life.
Amen.

Congregation: Amen.