

Rev. Alanna Sullivan: Good morning.

Audience: Good morning.

Rev. Sullivan: And welcome to morning prayers in Appleton Chapel. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the Black Appleton Psalter book Psalm selection number 46 found on page 23. Please stand as you are able as we read responsively that whole verse. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Audience: Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

Rev. Sullivan: Though the waters there are roar and be troubled. Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.

Audience: There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.

Rev. Sullivan: God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. God shall help her and that right early.

Audience: The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted.

Rev. Sullivan: The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.

Audience: Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth.

Rev. Sullivan: He maketh wars to see cease onto the end of the earth. He breaketh the bow. He cutteth the spear in sunder. He burneth the chariot in the fire.

Audience: Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

Rev. Sullivan: The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.

Choir: [singing]

Anya Bassett: Our scripture this morning is from the Book of Matthew chapter seven verses four and five. Jesus said, "How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Good morning.

Audience: Good morning.

- Bassett: One of the reasons I teach is to help my students to see differently, to present them with new information and to help them to understand perspectives that are different from the ones they arrive with. My goal is to help my students to make sense of the world we're living in and to support them as they consider their obligations as they prepare to enter that world. As a friend of mine said, if you plan to do something about the world to make it better than when you first found it, you need to know not only what people have thought in and about it, but how it actually works.
- Bassett: My own experience as a student was having so many specks removed from my eyes with the help of loving persistent teachers, but in recent years, the job of removing specs has gotten harder. To quote Psalm 46 as the kingdoms of the world are in an uproar and the earth is actually melting, our country and our campus has become more polarized. Students arrive in my classroom more anxious and less open to considering a wide range of perspectives. But Jesus doesn't focus on the job of the teacher to help students to take the specs from their eyes. He asks the teacher to focus on herself.
- Bassett: Where are the planks in your eyes? He asks. What is preventing you from fully seeing? What might you be missing? When you describe the world to your students? What might you be wrong about? As a teacher, my job is to develop a vision for my seminar on inequality and social mobility in America that I will teach this fall. I have chosen readings for our syllabus and I will shape the questions we consider, provide context for those questions and draw on my knowledge and experience to help my students learn. In teaching, as in life, we have to choose and we have to live with our choices.
- Bassett: But Jesus reminds us that we are not God. We are not all knowing and we can never be sure that we are right. He asks us to constantly revisit what we are seeing in what we are doing. And in this tumultuous time when many of us including me are attempted to double down on our beliefs, I think this lesson is worth focusing on for teachers as well as for students. So I've been trying to take planks out of my eyes and to see more clearly. Over the summer, I read two works that have taught me something about what I am missing.
- Bassett: One is the New York Times' 1619 Project documenting the ways that slavery has shaped American life from the structure of our markets to the way we think about health. I learned a lot that I had not formally known about race in the United States. The second is the book Dignity by photo journalist, Chris Arnot, which helped me to see more fully the human beings behind the cold numbers of the opioid crisis in America. And yet, Arnot insists that it is a mark of respect not to dismiss his subjects entirely as victims of their circumstances. I struggle with that idea.
- Bassett: As I prepare to enter my classroom, I'm thinking about ways to create a culture of humility. If we all start from a position of humility, if we focus on what we don't know as well as what we think we do know and if and if I remind my students that I'm learning along with them and also reflecting and struggling with my obligations toward the world we are living in, perhaps we can break through the anxiety of this era and engage in more genuine exploration. Finally, I remember that Jesus refers the person with a speck in his eye as a brother.

Bassett: Here, Jesus is reminding us that we are all part of the human family bound together as we do the hard work of examining the world and ourselves. Both humility and community are essential to building the trust needed for all of us to see and to pull out both specks and planks in the classroom. Let us pray.

Bassett: Lord, help us to be still amidst the tumult of your world today. To know that you are God and to be an humble community with each other as we try to understand this world so that we can make it a little better. Please guide us as we teach and learn in this new year at Harvard and at schools and universities around the world. And now let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us.

Bassett: 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 forever. Amen.

Rev. Sullivan: Will you please join me in singing the hymn Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise, hymn number 203 found in your Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Choir: [singing]

Rev. Sullivan: As we go into this day, may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. And may the Lord grant you peace. And the gathered people said, amen.

Audience: Amen.