

Westley Conn: Good morning

Congregation: Good morning.

Conn: Welcome to morning prayers. We'll begin today's service with a responsive reading from the black Appleton Chapel psalter book, Psalm selection number 60 found on page 30. Please stand as you are able.

Conn: Oh God, you have cast us off and broken us. You have been angry. Oh take us back to You again.

Congregation: You have shaken the earth and split it open. Repair the cracks in it, for it totters.

Conn: You have made your people know hardship. You have given us wine that makes us stagger.

Congregation: You have set up a banner for those who fear you, to be a refuge from the power of the bow.

Conn: Gilead is mine and Manasseh is mine. Ephraim is my helmet and Judah my scepter.

Congregation: Moab is my wash-basin. On Edom I throw down my sandal to claim it, and over Philistia will I shout in triumph.

Conn: Who will lead me into the strong city? who will bring me into Edom?

Congregation: Have you not cast us off, O God? You no longer go out, O God, with our armies.

Conn: Grant us your help against the enemy, for vain is the help of man.

Congregation: With God we will do valiant deeds, and he shall tread our enemies under foot.

Conn: You may take your seats.

Choir: (singing)

Katherine O'Dair: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

O'Dair: The text I've chosen this morning is a poem by Mary Oliver called *Don't Hesitate*. "If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty of lives and whole towns destroyed or about to be. We are not wise, and not very often kind. And much can never be redeemed. Still life has some possibility left. Perhaps this is its way of fighting back, that sometimes

something happened better than all the riches or power in the world. It could be anything, but very likely you notice it is the instant when love begins. Anyway, that's often the case. Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb."

O'Dair: My message this morning is as ordinary as the sun rising, but just as fundamental and important. It's about kindness. To me, kindness is both about being present with others and genuinely seeing others as human. I try to practice kindness daily in small ways, from saying hello to someone in the yard, or putting my phone down as I approach the cashier in a store. Those little moments matter because kindness matters. Our world does not seem all that kind lately, but I know that every one of us acts kindly in small and sometimes hidden ways.

O'Dair: I find it a little surprising when an act of human kindness is portrayed as being something exceptional, something to be acknowledged or celebrated. If you spend any time on social media, there are stories and videos of acts of kindness that elicit thousands of likes, which with credit to the person for whatever act of generosity. Yet, I believe the greatest forms of kindness are those that only we know about, those daily actions that enable our spirits to fly, that help us contribute to a community where we want to live and be. But, it should not matter who is watching, because being kind is not episodic and does not need to be chronicled for it to be real. It comes from within.

O'Dair: And the person who you want to recognize your actions is not the person on the tee taking the video or your friend or your teacher. It's you. True kindness emerges when we are called to see people for being people, not for what they do or their title or their status in society. Each summer, I volunteer for a major charity event in central Massachusetts that raises significant funds for cancer research. As part of my work, I do various tasks like park cars, set up tables, or pick up trash. It's important work, and I love the anonymity of wearing the volunteer t-shirt, because when I do, I'm just Katie. I'm not Dean O'Dair. I'm not where I'm from. I'm not anything that people sometimes use to categorize or evaluate me, like where I work, or how accomplished I am at something.

O'Dair: I have been on the receiving end of wonderful acts of kindness in this role, like when a participant stopped what they were doing to help me move a few large boxes. But, I have also been a recipient of unkindness where people either don't notice you, or say or do things that reveal their truest and not often best selves. This usually happens when you have to tell someone no. While it sounds cliché, I've had someone ask me if I knew who they were, implying that I would act differently because of this information.

O'Dair: It never fails to remind me of the importance of being fully present with people you meet and engage with every day, and never assume that you know anything about someone because of the characteristics that they present or the tasks

that they do. One of the best ways to spread kindness is to receive it graciously. I've learned from times when I did not do that.

O'Dair: During a time in need, a friend gave me multiple rides to doctors appointments when I could not drive. I sent him a small gift card in thanks. He mailed it back to me saying that he did it because he loves me and he doesn't need a gift or payment. I was hurt at first, but then I realized that I had made his act of kindness a transaction, taking his gift and monetizing it. Now, when my neighbor waters my lawn and sends me a photo of a rainbow that formed from the water stream, I say, "Thank you." When someone remembers something obscure that I told them months ago, I let them know how meaningful that was.

O'Dair: I feel so present in the moments I receive kindness. I hope that everyone can focus today on spreading and receiving kindness. Let us pray.

O'Dair: Lord, set us off into this day to be kind to others, even when the world around us is swirling and broken. Set us off to this day to be an open receiver of kindness from others. Thank you for being true, kind, and my foundation to lean on. Today, we boldly and humbly approach you, asking for your kindness to meet us.

O'Dair: Please join in the saying of The Lord's Prayer.

Everyone: 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, for ever and ever. Amen.

Conn: Please stand as you are able to sing together the hymn, Thou Whose Almighty Word, number 273 in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation: (singing)

Conn: Receive now these good words. May the Lord keep you from evil, and may the Lord keep you in your going out and in your coming in, from this time on, and forever more. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.