

Stephanie Paulsell: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

Paulsell: Welcome to morning prayers. Would you stand for our responsive reading, number 130 in Appleton Chapel psalter on page 65. Number 130.

Paulsell: Out of the depths have I called to you. Oh God, hear my voice. Let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.

Congregation: If you were to note what is done amiss, O God, who could Stand?

Paulsell: For there is forgiveness with you. Therefore you shall be feared.

Congregation: I wait for you, O God; my soul waits for you; in your word is my hope.

Paulsell: My soul waits for you more than centuries for the morning, more than centuries for the morning.

Congregation: Oh Israel, wait upon God, for with God there is mercy.

Paulsell: With God there is plenteous redemption. God shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

Choir: (singing)

Rakesh Khurana: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

Khurana: For many years now I've had the privilege of living and learning in a community of young people. My own kids, who now range from 17 to 22, as well as Harvard undergraduates and graduate students. One of the best things about serving as a faculty Dean and living amongst students is that I'm always learning, about new trends, new apps, new lingo, new perspectives. I'm constantly reminded of how the world changes. When students challenge me, whether about politics, music, the environment, or events here on campus, I face a choice. I can either dig into my worldview and resist or I can reflect, remember that there's always more to learn, and challenge myself to stay open to changing my mind. And I have changed my mind many times over these years, although not always. I'm grateful to be part of this community in which I'm pushed to think more deeply and question my assumptions.

Khurana: Here on our campus we have the luxury of building personal relationships and taking time for deep conversation. It is possible, although certainly not easy, to do the work of embracing multiple perspectives, of reflecting, of changing our minds, of persuading others to change theirs. But this work has become challenging in new ways in a culture where so much of our interaction takes place on social media, where the temptation to

deal with those we disagree with is to shout at them. In the best circumstances social media has allowed people to connect who may never have had the opportunities to connect offline, but too often communication online takes the form of talking at each other rather than with each other.

Khurana: I'm certainly not the first to observe that interaction on social media tends to flatten nuance and complexity, and that online, a common mode of engaging with those we disagree with is simply to disengage. But the ease with which we write off other human beings online has been on my mind these past few months, as it seems that increasingly this online mode of interaction has crept into our offline lives as well. It has become more commonplace to talk of canceling those whose views we disagree, the way you would cancel a subscription. So much so, that this summer Merriam-Webster Dictionary placed cancel culture on a list of words it is watching and considering adding to the dictionary. And where once we may have heard primarily about canceling a celebrity whose views we find distasteful, we now hear the term in casual conversation as in, "I'm canceling that professor, or canceling a peer, because of their views on certain issues."

Khurana: It's not surprising that in our time of extreme polarization, when people within the same family can't discuss politics, that the phenomenon of canceling people has taken root. When we cancel someone, we are embracing the idea that people can be reduced to binaries, good, bad, us, them, right, wrong, and it is certainly tempting to adopt this way of thinking. We live in this world in which we are rightly offended at what people get away with, in which for too long countless survivors of injustice have been denied a voice, and so given the amount of trauma caused by racism, colonialism, bigotry, and the way that power has been used against some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of our society, it is understandable that when there is an opportunity to shout someone down, we take it.

Khurana: But our binary way of thinking also leaves us stuck. We may find an outlet for our anger, but we may not find solutions to the problems that have sparked that anger. You can get stuck in an infinite loop of anger and blame that is difficult to break. In his autobiography, *Long Walk To Freedom*, Nelson Mandela noted that societies get stuck when they find an outlet for anger but not one for solutions. He wrote, "If you want to make peace with your enemy you have to work with your enemy, then he becomes your partner." Perhaps we need to follow in Mandela's footsteps and try to make partners of our adversaries. The alternative, to reserve our empathy and energy only for those who already agree with us, will only create more polarization and close off opportunities for growth. If we accept that there's no path to redemption, no way to reconcile with those who disagree with us, then we're making a profound statement about the kind of world we want to live in.

Khurana: If we want to live in a world in which there are paths to redemption and forgiveness, in which real change is possible, then we have to find a way to get unstuck, to resolve the tension between our anger at injustice, and our need to move forward as a society. And we do need each other. We are constantly reminded of this as we have been in recent weeks by hurricane Dorian, the fact that pandemics do not carry passports, mass

shootings in our schools. We are constantly reminded that our shared fate as a species is intertwined.

Khurana: But how do we get unstuck? I don't have an easy answer to this question. But I know that canceling other human beings will not make our problems disappear. I know that we need leaders, and we need to be leaders, who can approach people and challenge their ideas while also creating room for growth and renewal. We need to embrace the tension between fighting for our just vision of society and working with our adversaries. I'm again inspired by Nelson Mandela's words about forgiveness. "Courageous people do not fear forgiving for the sake of peace."

Khurana: As this new academic year begins, I hope we can concentrate on the hard work of challenging ideas while building bridges between human beings, of taking clear stands against what is wrong, while appreciating the complexity within ourselves and others, and of embracing possibility rather than the despair at the challenges ahead. We may not be able to change the world without anger, but one thing I'm certain of, is that our anger at injustice, at politicians, and most of all at each other, is not going to be enough to create a better society.

Khurana: I hope that here at Harvard to find ways to reaffirm that love, compassion, and forgiveness matter, and that we can be hard on our problems while being easy on each other.

Paulsell: Will you pray with me?

Paulsell: We thank you God of life for bringing us in safety to this new day. May we receive it with joy, and move through it with attention and compassion for one another, seeking to join you in ways large and small, visible and hidden, in the work of loving and repairing this world. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.

Paulsell: I invite you to join me in the Lord's Prayer, found on the back of the order of worship.

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 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 and ever. Amen.

Paulsell: Please stand as you are able, for our hymn number 40, Morning Has Broken.

Paulsell: (singing).

Paulsell: [inaudible 00:14:42] Khurana we thank you for challenging us this morning. And now may the spirit of God enlighten us, transform us, and lead us into life. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.