

KMarie Tejeda: Good morning. Welcome to morning prayer. If you'll please stand if you are able and join me in our responsive reading, which is Morning East, Psalm 98, found in your black Appleton Chapel Psalter book on page 49.

KMarie Tejeda: Sing to the Lord a new song. For he has worked wonders. His right hand, his Holy arm has won him victory.

Congregation: The Lord has manifested his victory, has displayed His triumph in the sight of the nations.

KMarie Tejeda: He was mindful of his steadfast love and faithfulness toward the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth, be hailed the victory of our God.

Congregation: Raise a shout to the Lord, all the earth, break into joyous songs of praise!

KMarie Tejeda: Sing praise to the Lord, with the lyre, with the lyre and melodious song.

Congregation: With trumpets and the blast of the horn raise a shout before the Lord, the king.

KMarie Tejeda: Let the sea all within it thunder, the world and its inhabitants.

Congregation: Let the rivers clap their hands, the mountains sing joyously together.

KMarie Tejeda: At the presence of the Lord, for He is coming to rule the earth; He will rule the world justly, and its peoples with equity.

Choir: (singing)

Tamira Stephens: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

Tamira Stephens: My reading is adopted from Anne Lamott's Help. Thanks. Wow. The three essential prayers. Prayer can be anything. It's all prayer. It is motion and stillness and energy all at the same time and begins when we stop where we are, tired of working so hard that we surrender turning towards something else. Prayer is seeking union even when we are bitter or broken or insane. Prayer is chancing, that against all odds and past history, we are loved and do not have to have it all together. Prayer is making contact with the unseen, greater than ourselves having to do with the eternal, with vitality, intelligence, and kindness. Even when we are at our most skeptical and utterly doomed, God can handle honesty, and prayer begins this honest conversation.

Tamira Stephens: This book was brought to my attention by what I can now only consider prayer. After a year of difficult change and painful unexpected loss, I became severely depressed, unable to cope with a reality for which I was unprepared. Months

crept by as I floundered, returning to a life I had one fluffed behind. Most of my time was spent either at the community pool or in bed staring at screens. I felt lost and disoriented as if I'd forgotten who I was and where I was going. Later when describing these feelings to my doctor, his response left me speechless. How could a theologian forget how to orient her life? I've rarely considered myself as such, but nevertheless, the weight of his question remained.

Tamira Stephens: My prayer had been simple. Just four words, "Mom, I need help." I called out as she walked past my room and noticing my hands. They were busy disassembling of pink, disposable razor. The time with flowers on the handle. My fingertips were scratched, bearing thin, shallow cuts from the double blades, searching for relief, ideation tipped into action and I wanted to die. I'm still unsure as to what prevailed that day, divine intervention, the power of a mother's love or a simple will to live, but I am certain that in my darkest moment, I turned to prayer.

Tamira Stephens: While my life and work are full of religion, the presence of God is rarely evident. As for religious affiliation, I claimed my own label as secular Methodist, acknowledging my personal ties to the United Methodist Church, while making no claim to ultimate truth. Yet even I cannot deny one of the many ineffable qualities of prayer. That one was moved us to abandon the false notions that we are not good enough and must know it all.

Tamira Stephens: We've been conditioned to hide our weaknesses, admit no fault and fake it till we make it, whatever it happens to be. We hold back our questions and concerns in an effort to bolster our credibility as though we are ashamed of our community. The stress of constant competition goes unacknowledged, taking its toll on our mental and physical health, destroying our sense of common purpose and collective understanding. And while there are real fears and vulnerability, the idea that we are somehow made unworthy from a lack of knowledge is a lie born from fear and oppression. It is not wrong or shameful to ask for help or to ask for clarification, admit mistakes or voice concern or even to hit rock bottom. Everyone with a story to tell seems to get there eventually.

Tamira Stephens: We are often too shortsighted in our focus looking at the struggle and not the solution. The truth is we don't know everything nor do we need to. Having all the answers is not a requirement for a life well lived. Instead, we require honesty, not only from one another, but from ourselves. In order to see and accept the help we so often need.

Tamira Stephens: I share my story for neither sympathy nor excuse. My diagnoses do not absolve my past mistakes, though they may offer explanation. Rather, having had much time and an undeserved amount of love and support, I reside in a place of deep acceptance regarding my mental health, which leads me to speak openly on my experience.

Tamira Stephens: Our present condition demands change. For far too long. We have relegated the subject of mental illness to the background, fearful of the many stigmas

associated with diagnosis and disorders, but we owe it to ourselves and one another to speak when necessary. Remembering that silence is a privilege by which nothing is gained and that change, like prayer, must begin with honest conversation. Thank you.

KMarie Tejada: Let us pray, the Lord's prayer, found on the reverse of your 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, Amen.

KMarie Tejada: Please stand if you are able, and join together in singing, Through All the Changing Scenes of Life, found in your Queen's Song Hymnal, hymn number 283.

Congregation: (singing).

KMarie Tejada: And now, let us go. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord grant you the desires of your heart, giving you joy, peace, love and forgiveness, for ever and ever. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.