

Wes Conn: Good morning.

Congregation : Good morning.

Wes Conn: Welcome to morning prayers. We'll begin today's service with the responsive reading from the Black Appleton Chapel Psalter Book, Psalm selection number 39, found on page 20. Please stand as you are able.

Wes Conn: I said I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue. I will keep a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence.

Congregation : I was silent and still; I held my peace to no avail; my distress grew worse.

Wes Conn: My heart became hot within me. While I mused, the fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue.

Congregation : Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.

Wes Conn: You have made my days a few handbreaths and my lifetime is nothing in your sight. Surely everyone stands as a mere breath.

Congregation : Surely, everyone goes about like a shadow. Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; they heap up, and do not know who will gather.

Wes Conn: Hear my prayer, oh Lord, and give ear to my cry. Do not hold your peace at my tears.

Congregation : For I am your passing guest, and alien, like all my forebears.

Wes Conn: Turn your gaze away from me that I may smile again before I depart and am no more. You may take your seats.

Choir: (singing).

Elizabeth Propst: Good morning.

Congregation : Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst: Thank you to the choir, y'all are always very beautiful. I would like to share a poem by the American poet David Wagoner, who lived in the Pacific Northwest for the majority of his life. The poem is called Lost.

Elizabeth Propst: Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you are not lost. Wherever you are is called here and you must treat it as a powerful stranger. You must ask permission to know it and be known. The forest breathes. Listen, it answers. I

have made this place around you. If you leave it, you may come back again. Saying here. No two trees are the same to Raven. No two branches are the same to Wren. If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you, you are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows where you are. You must let it find you.

Elizabeth Propst: I thought of this poem a lot since I moved to Cambridge, which is more than a year ago now. I'm from the Appalachian Mountains in North Carolina and I grew up spending most of my days in the forests that surround my house, that remind me a lot of this poem. This poem reminds me of those woods, busy silences filled with birdsong, the rustle of leaves, the snaps of twigs, and the wind ruffling the tree tops.

Elizabeth Propst: When I want to think of home too, I think of Psalm 121, a song of a sense. It begins, I lift up my eyes to the mountains from whence cometh my help. My help comes from the Lord, the maker of Heaven and earth. God waits for us, I think, in the rugged places of the world, up on the mountains in the lonely forest that David Wagoner meditates on.

Elizabeth Propst: Modern digitally connected life can make one feel very small, like one impermanent voice among the billions. That's an isolating kind of smallness. The smallness that you feel on top of the peak or deep in a cloudy valley is a joyful, unifying smallness. For me at least.

Elizabeth Propst: When you remember that far from being a blip on someone else's timeline, you are part of a great creative exhalation that began with the Heavens, the earth, and the light that God makes in the first chapter of Genesis.

Elizabeth Propst: In Genesis too, God grants man dominion over the earth and all of its non-human inhabitants. This is often interpreted as a right to exploitation and abuse of our natural resources. That because God created these things for us, it is to us to do with them as we will. But later on in the Old Testament, in Leviticus Chapter 25, verses 23 and 24, God speaks, "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. Throughout the land that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land."

Elizabeth Propst: This interestingly appears in the middle of a very riveting passage on divinely ordained real estate requirements. But it reminds us that we are all sojourners, all tourists, no different from the ones that walk through Harvard yard every day. Even when we are in what we may think of as our own homes and our own native countries.

Elizabeth Propst: God ultimately calls us to walk lightly on the earth, to provide for the redemption of the land, as he says, to not only renew ourselves in the natural world, but to bring rebirth with us.

Elizabeth Propst: The redemptive quietness and the comfortable solitude of our planet's wild spaces is threatened by forces that we all know of, climate change, rising sea levels, deforestation. So I would ask two things of you today as we walk out into this rainy morning together. First that you find a small piece of wilderness, however you wish to define that, and take it into yourself. And secondly, that you consciously go out of your way to pick up an empty bottle lying on the ground or to walk somewhere instead of driving, even in the rain, or to take a shorter shower than normal. To not think of that action as a moral imperative or a civic duty, but as a moment of prayer to the God who surrounds us in every branch, every drop of water, and every ray of sunlight. Thank you.

Elizabeth Props: Please join me in reciting the words of the Lord's Prayer.

Congregation : Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. 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.

Wes Conn: Please stand as you are able to sing together the hymn, Awake, Awake, to Love and Work, number 46 in your Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation : (singing).

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

Congregation : Amen.