

Stephanie Paulsell: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

Stephanie Paulsell: Welcome to morning prayers. Would you join me for our responsive reading number 139 on page 70 of the slim black book in your pew? "Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me."

Congregation: "You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You discern my thoughts from far away."

Stephanie Paulsell: "You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways."

Congregation: "Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely."

Stephanie Paulsell: "You hem me in behind and before and lay your hand upon me."

Congregation: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is so high I cannot attain it."

Stephanie Paulsell: "Where can I go from your spirit, or where can I flee from your presence?"

Congregation: "If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there."

Stephanie Paulsell: "If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea."

Congregation: "Even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast."

Stephanie Paulsell: "If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me and the light around me become night.'"

Congregation: "Even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is as bright as the day. For darkness is as light to You."

Choir: (Singing)

David Gergen: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

David Gergen: We're especially proud today to welcome to this group, our congregation today, students who are first generation within their family. Could those of you who are first-generation stand if we could? You're brave souls. Thank you for being part of this community. We love to have you here. This is also a day of memories. 30 years ago today, the Berlin Wall fell. Freedom was expanded. We're still struggling to keep people free but nonetheless, that remains a very

powerful day in our memories. In that spirit of memories that I'd like to talk to you this morning about a dear friend and colleague from years past, the Reverend Peter J. Gomes.

David Gergen: In dark times like these, when one is seeking spiritual guidance, I often think of him. Those of you who are undergraduates, may not know who Peter was and why he matters. For 37 years, he served this university as the Plummer Professor of Christian Morals at the Divinity School and Pusey Minister at this church until some eight years ago. He died too young at 69. Peter was one of the best preachers in the country, whose wisdom and charisma fired up and captivated students, staff, and faculty alike. He was certainly one of a kind, black, gay, and a Republican for most of his life. Those of us who scrambled to hear him on a Sunday came from many different denominations, but as Henry Louis Gates said, "We all became Gomesians."

David Gergen: Peter also had a grand sense of humor. I well remember one Easter Sunday as he prepared to send out the collection plate, Peter proclaiming to the congregation, "I have good news and bad news. The good news is that we have all the money this church will ever need. The bad news is that it's in your pockets." Well, as you can imagine, the plates came back brimming that day. When rough times hit, I like so many others from those days ask, "What would Peter tell us? What guidance might he offer if he were here this morning?" The answers, I believe, are embedded in the books where his sermons are collected, nine volumes, no less.

David Gergen: Rereading a number of them in preparation for this visit, his messages jumped off the page. "Christians, he argued, "too often look to God to solve tough problems for us, whether in our personal lives or in our nation." But he said, quote, "It is a shabby faith that suggests that God is to do all the heavy lifting and that you and I are to do none. God does not spare us from turmoil. God strengthens us for turmoil. Trouble, turmoil, tribulation, temptations, we should see these as givens in the human condition and the question becomes, 'How should we respond to them?' With endurance," he argued.

David Gergen: Quote, "Don't rush, don't panic. What are we to do in calamitous times? We are to slow down. We are to inquire. We are to endure. Tribulation does not invite haste. It invites contemplation, reflection, perseverance, endurance. One finds strength before the journey," He believed, "by turning to God for refuge and strength. From God comes inner strength amidst outer turmoil." That was Luther's point in his great hymn, A Mighty Fortress is Our God. Paraphrasing St. Paul, Peter added, "We may be knocked down, but we are never knocked out." Or, in one of his favorite phrases, he urged that, "When troubles strike, toughen up, get used to it, get over it, get on with it."

David Gergen: Peter had one other lesson relevant to today's troubles. He warned us off a mindless optimism about the future. Just as God will not shield us from calamities, God will not ensure a happy outcome. "Black people in America,"

said Peter, "have never been optimistic. For we know better, but we have always been hopeful, full of hope." He insisted that optimism simply doesn't cut it. It cannot stand the sharp ray of experience or disappointment. Optimism alone drives people into fantasy and sometimes into terrible rage and disappointment. We see too much of that rage among many of our frustrated citizens today.

David Gergen: Instead of a shallow optimism, Peter insisted that we embrace an abiding sense of hope. The substance of hope is that somehow we will get through. That kind of hope requires imagination and enormous courage to go forward whatever the odds against you. That kind of hope is the ultimate resource available to the faithful. Quote, "Hope allows us to see beyond what is and to imagine, to see with our inner eye what might and what ought to be." Christian hope is meant to guide you into the place where you have not yet been and end up becoming the person that you had not yet become.

David Gergen: Summing up, Peter pointed once again because the writing of St. Paul in Romans 15:4. "For whatever was written in former days, was written for our instruction that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of scriptures, we might have hope." Peter Gomes was a beacon of light in his community for nearly four decades. We miss him now. We will miss him always. May we bow our heads. Father, we ask thy help in finding strength for the journey. Through contemplation, reflection, and perseverance, may we in these troubled times learn to endure and may we as well find the courage to hope. We pray in the Father's name and thank Him for the prayer he left us together.

All: 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. Lead us not... 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.

Stephanie Paulsell: Would you stand for our him number 190, The Great Creator of the Worlds?

Congregation: (Singing)

Stephanie Paulsell: Professor Gergen, thank you so much for those reflections on Peter Gomes and all that he called us to do and to be. We invite you to join us for a special MemCafe this morning in the Memorial Room to celebrate the first-generation student community at Harvard. Today is National First-Generation College Student Day, which was established to commemorate the signing of the 1965 Higher Education Act that provided critical, financial, and support resources for low-income, first-generation students to become the first in their families to earn college degrees. So please come and celebrate with us in the Memorial Room right off the center aisle. And now may the movement of God's spirit

awaken our imaginations, enliven our senses, and lead us more deeply into life.
Amen.

Audience: Amen.