

Wes Conn: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

Wes 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 23. Please stand as you are able.

Wes Conn: The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

Congregation: He maketh me to lye down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside still waters.

Wes Conn: He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in straight paths for his name's sake.

Congregation: Ye, thought I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod, and thy staff, they comfort me.

Wes Conn: Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou hast anointed my head with oil. My cup runneth over.

Congregation: Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Wes Conn: You may take your seats.

Choir: (Singing).

Deborah Forger: A poem by W.H. Auden. How could the eternal do a temporal act? The infinite become a finite fact. Nothing can save us that is possible. Yesterday morning, as I sat down to prepare these remarks, I was flooded by noise. Not literal noise, mind you, because saved from the clicks of the keyboards of the person sitting nearby me, and the occasional cough or sneeze or shuffling around of papers of the persons sitting beside me, I was seated in the quiet of a university library. A calming place for me. a space where I can typically think. And yet yesterday, I was flooded with noise. Noise from the academic papers that have yet to be written, but whose deadlines are looming. Noise from the many familial tasks that consumes so much of my energy these days; the groceries to shop for, the meals to make, the laundry to fold, the bills to pay, the travel plans to arrange. Noise from my daily newsfeeds that reveal a country deeply divided in the midst of impeachment hearings, that feel both more urgent and more distant than those in the past.

Deborah Forger: Noise from my life's daily obligations, noise from our nations' irreconcilable divisions, noise from the messiness of my mundane and misfit and muddled life. When sounds like these rezoned in our ears, as in the words of the apostle Paul, resounding gongs or clanging symbol, how does the divine break in? How does

the transcendent, the all-knowing, the all-powerful, the benevolent, the eternal, the infinite entity, which some refer to as God and some simply conceive of as some sort of higher power, but is both beyond and above us, or somehow mysteriously interwoven within all of us. How does that divine inspiration break in?

Deborah Forger: Into our ordinary human existence? Into the messiness of our quotidian lives? Into the hustle and bustle and hurried existence that we live in each day? Can the eternal do a temporal act? The infinite, a finite fact. These days, it seems to me that the impossible is required to save us. When I was a child, I was taught that faith was about having the right beliefs, about ascribing to the correct tenants, about affirming a particular form of officially sanctioned doctrine. Faith was about my mind's ability to know God rightly. But these days, I trust my hands and my feet, my eyes and my ears, my lips and tongue and throat much more, in their ability to awaken and inspire within me, glimpses of the divine.

Deborah Forger: Over a decade ago when I was fresh out of seminary and serving in my first congregational setting, I encountered Stephanie Paulsell's work, *Honoring the Body: For the First Time*. In this work, she invites us to consider how seemingly mundane bodily activities like bathing and clothing and dressing and even having sex, can be sacred moments; moments, which I would argue, allow us to catch glimpses of the divine. More recently, I'd been working my way through parts of Tracy Smith's wonderful new book, *Faithful Families*, with my own children. From saying a daily blessing over their head before they go to bed at night, to taking out chalk and writing our worries together in the driveway and then taking physical water and washing them away. These physical acts remind us of God's presence in the world. And Tracy's work is brimming with these sorts of ideas of how to transform everyday moments into sacred realities, thereby enabling us to embrace the mystery and the wonder of the divine.

Deborah Forger: So as you leave this place this morning, I invite you to develop and embrace one new sort of spiritual practice. It need not be elaborate. Something as simple as taking deep breaths of gratitude, in and out, as you walk across the campus each day, thanking God for all that God has given. Or lighting a candle in the evening to remind you that God's light can shine even in the darkest of moments, will do. but it should be daily and it should be quite intentional. It should engage your own body and your own physical senses in order to connect with the divine. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.

Deborah Forger: Will you please join with me in prayer? Good and gracious God. As we depart from this place, we pray that you would not only enlighten our minds with truth and inflames our hearts with love, but that you would inspire our hands and our feet to practice, enable our tongues to taste your goodness and our ears to hear the sweet melodies from above. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.

Deborah Forger: Would you please join with me in saying the Lord's prayer together? 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

Wes Conn: Let us sing together the hymn, Comfort, Comfort Ye My People. Number 94 in your Crimson Harbor hymnal. Please stand as you are able.

Congregation: (Singing).

Wes 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 forevermore. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.