

Theresa Lungu:

Good morning and welcome to morning prayers at the Memorial church. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the black Appleton [inaudible 00:03:48] book, Psalm number 46 found on page 23. Please stand as you're able to read responsively by whole verse.

Theresa Lungu:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Congregation:

Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

Theresa Lungu:

Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.

Congregation:

There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.

Theresa Lungu:

God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.

Congregation:

The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted.

Theresa Lungu:

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Congregation:

Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth.

Theresa Lungu:

He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.

Congregation:

Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

Theresa Lungu:

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Choir:

(Singing)

Na'Shantea Miller:

Good morning. I'll be sharing just a story, a testimony. It begins like this. I stood there not knowing what to do. Just moments before the pastor had said something about someone that could have applied to almost anyone in the crowd of people that gathered on a Thursday night at church in Senegal. Although my black skin allowed me to blend to the crowd of Senegalese people, I was a foreigner, a Canadian who stood by myself among the crowd of hundreds of people who had come to express their love for God with a level of passion that was foreign to me. I was 22 at the time. I thought I was in Senegal for internship, but God brought me there for so much more.

I remember when I was maybe 10 or 12, my black skin allowed me to blend into another crowd, a crowd of family and relatives. It was Christmas, and we prayed and thanked God for the meal. Other than that, at large family gatherings on holidays, my family rarely prayed or talked about Jesus, let alone live out the love of Jesus in our home. At best, we were a culturally Christian household. We kids were sent to church almost every Sunday after all, but at worst, we were a broken family with obvious tensions between our live faith and name faith, tension that resulted in brokenness in my family that remains to this day.

I remember 18-year-old me curiously asking my pastor questions that I was just struggling with and just being told, just read your Bible. Fortunately, I started going to a church that not only tried to answer my questions, but encouraged me to ask them. I was challenged not just to know about God, but to know Him personally. I'll never forget the time when instead of me asking all the questions, a question was asked of me.

"Do you know that you know that you know that you know that you know that you know that you know, the person repeated that you've heard the voice of God?" That was asked of me by Melissa on a Friday night at a youth gathering. And if she had just asked, "Do you know that you've heard the voice of God?" I would've said yes, but she asked it so many times, I couldn't say yes with that much clarity.

I could have continued to blend in with the crowd, but I had to be honest with myself and with God, so I raised my hand to say no, I didn't know that I heard the voice of God that clearly. At this point, I knew that Christianity was not about following religious rules to earn God's love and acceptance, unlike some other world views that teach that you have to earn your way to salvation or freedom or another whatever ultimate goal, I remember the great weight that was lifted off my shoulders when I truly realized that I didn't have to work hard enough to be good enough for God. Instead, God was fully aware of my brokenness and was calling me into a personal relationship with Him anyways. But the problem was, I didn't have that personal relationship. I knew of God, but I didn't know him personally. I knew him through other people's experience and stories in the Bible, but not like stories in my own life of how God has showed up.

So, fast forward, I'm in Senegal in church talking to Jesus, but I missed what the pastor said. "There's a woman who God wants to use to make an impact," the pastor repeated. This time, what he said caught my attention, not because of what he said, but what I felt. I stood there feeling that something was beginning to stir my stomach, a gentle tugging of chords urging me to step forward, and the urging grew. I stood asking God the same question, "Are you talking to me? What is this feeling in my

stomach?" I stood hearing the pastor say something like, "This woman is resisting, and she'll miss what God is trying to do in this moment."

I stood there unsure whether God was talking to me, but I was definitely resisting and the urge was only going stronger, so I decided that it couldn't just stand. So instead of standing there, I took a step. With each step, the urge got stronger and started moving upward. By the time I got to the altar, I was talking to Jesus, but in a different way, in another language. Clicks and clacks emerged from my tongue with such fluency, tears flowed from my eyes, I experienced an outpouring like never before. It was amazing. God was talking to me and confirming that he wanted to use me to make an impact.

What I described to you is just one way that God tangibly shows himself that he is with me. In Joel 2, God said that he will pour out his spirit on his people. However, God is with me and with us in all different ways, the whole story of the Bible is a story of God's desire to be with us. Curiously enough, I realized in Matthew, it starts with the Virgin shall conceive a son, and we shall name him Emmanuel, God with us. And then the last verses of Matthew end with Jesus saying, "I will be with you until the end of the age." And this is what it means for God to be with us. And knowing this has transformed me and my relationship with God, just knowing that he loves us, that he loves me, and that as much... God himself who has come, he became human to be a human I can never be to save us from a broken world.

And yeah, so it was just amazing to have that experience of really tangibly feeling God personally, knowing him, and he continues to speak to me to this day. And my prayer is that he will speak to each and every you one of you in a special way as well.

Theresa Lungu:

Thank you, Na'Shantea.

Theresa Lungu:

Please stand as you're able and let us pray.

Theresa Lungu:

Dear God, let us be still and know that you are in our midst, and may the beginning of a new day renew our hearts in your promise of love and protection. Amen.

Theresa Lungu/ Congregation:

And together, let us recite the Lord's prayer saying, 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, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Theresa Lungu:

And now, let us sing the hymn, Let Us With a Gladsome Mind. Number 8 found in the crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:
(Singing)

Theresa Lungu:

As we go forth into this day, let us rejoice in the privilege of being able to share in this time together, time to connect with heaven and God's promises, time to reflect and to breathe in the wonder of God's love. Amen.

Congregation:
Amen.