

Sally Hammel:

Good morning and welcome to morning prayers. Will you please stand as you're able and join me in reading Psalm 92 in the Black Appleton Psalter?

Sally Hammel:

"It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Thy Name, O Most High."

Congregation:

"To declare Thy steadfast love in the morning, and Thy faithfulness by night."

Sally Hammel:

"To the music of the lute and the harp, and the melody of the lyre."

Congregation:

"For Thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by Thy work. At the works of Thy hands, I sing for joy."

Sally Hammel:

"The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon."

Congregation:

"They are planted in the house of the Lord. They flourish in the courts of our God."

Sally Hammel:

"They still bring forth fruit in old age. They are ever full of sap and green."

Congregation:

"To show that the Lord is upright, He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

Choir:

(singing).

Toni L. Griffin:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Toni L. Griffin:

Thank you for the honor of offering a reflection to you this morning. One day, I read a daily devotion where the author referenced Hebrews 3:7-19 and summarized the following: "God speaks to all of us, but how we respond depends on the condition of our heart. Upon hearing the Lord's voice, some believers are motivated to pursue a deeper and more obedient relationship with the Father. Others,

however, resist or refuse Him because their heart has become less responsive." How do you respond when the Holy Spirit speaks to you, and what does God's voice sound like?

Toni L. Griffin:

I hear God's voice in two different ways. In the first, I think God's voice is a feeling, like the impulse that drives creativity. In design, they say the best ideas happen early in the design process. The longer we spend refining or trying to come up with alternatives, the more you risk diluting our creativity with self-doubt and judgment. The first idea in the creative process comes from the gut, seemingly a subconscious representation of an imagined aspiration, an expression of our truest voice.

Toni L. Griffin:

I feel like I resist God's voice all the time. I feel compelled to write a book framed around design and social justice, for example, but I have procrastinated and squashed its start over and over and over again under the weight of fear, fear of exposing my point of view and subjecting my voice to critique, because being creative is to make your voice visible.

Toni L. Griffin:

Have any of you ever been afraid to do something you felt called to do, driven to do, compelled to do? Do you resist making your creativity visible? Nine years ago, I almost walked away from my career in design and urban planning. I just resigned as Director of Planning and Community Development for the city of Newark, New Jersey under Mayor Cory Booker's first term. By this point, I had practiced 10 years as a licensed architect in Chicago for a very well-known firm. I spent my first year here at Harvard as a local fellow at the Graduate School of Design, and I already served in several senior positions in government.

Toni L. Griffin:

But during my last months in Newark, I became really suspicious of the impact I was making to revitalize cities while also trying to improve communities of color. By now, I had seen firsthand how the legacy of discriminatory practices had left inner city neighborhoods and its residents underserved and under-invested. The weight of this injustice caused me to seriously question whether my agency as a designer could reverse the damage that government itself had created.

Toni L. Griffin:

So I quit my job in New York, without having a job, and enrolled in a course at the French Culinary Institute in Soho. I was going to be a chef. Early every Saturday morning for 22 weeks, I would drag myself out of bed, travel from Newark to New York for the five-hour instruction taught by a tough but lovable French instructor. But I still found myself very drawn to urban issues of cities, and design, and urban development. Something told me that I wasn't done being an urbanist.

Toni L. Griffin:

This brings me to the second way I hear God's voice. One day, I got a call that presented an opportunity to answer the very question I had left on the table before running off to learn how to make the perfect mother sauces: Can design have a meaningful impact on urban justice? The call led to a project in Detroit that would launch my private practice urban planning for the American city now celebrating its 10-year anniversary this year, and subsequently, the inauguration of my design research that is now situated at the Graduate School of Design called, The Just City Lab.

Toni L. Griffin:

God's voice came in the form of an opportunity. I feel immense gratitude for the choices that have shown up in my life that have kept me in the space of design and urbanism, even though I have often questioned, sometimes resisted, and occasionally fought not to be boxed into.

Toni L. Griffin:

"I don't want to be the social justice girl," I would tell myself often, especially when I felt society would see me only as a black woman and make confined assumptions about my interest and my expertise. Yet, this is the kind of work God's voice has led me to. Perhaps I should've seen this coming because I was, in fact, born on the day that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed.

Toni L. Griffin:

"So be not resistant, be not afraid," I tell myself most mornings. And now I advised you, because at this point God's voice should sound like who you are, God's voice should sound like you.

Sally Hammel:

Thank you. Will you pray with me?

Sally Hammel:

Oh God, You are both the light and the guide of those who put their trust in You. Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what You would have us do, that the Spirit of Wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in Your light, we may see light through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Congregation:

Amen.

Sally Hammel:

Now, will you say the Lord's Prayer on the back of your order of worship?

Sally Hammel:

Our Father ...

Congregation:

Who art in Heaven, hallowed by 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 have trespassed 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.

Sally Hammel:

Will you please stand as you are able to sing the hymn number 314, O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee? Number 314.

Congregation:

(singing)

Sally Hammel:

So, today is Wednesday. We have MemCafé downstairs in the Student Oasis. I hope you will come join us for coffee and fellowship. And now, let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.