

Grace Killian:

A reading from Romans chapter eight verses 26 to 27. Likewise, the spirit helps us in our weakness for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words and God who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the spirit, because the spirit intercedes for the saints, according to the will of God.

Grace Killian:

In the last few days, I have struggled to know what to say. I am sure I am not alone in this experience. In some ways it feels like we have been inundated with noise and the flurry of emails so many of us have received about the Corona virus over the last several days. So much necessary practical information has been shared, but it seems we often lack something deeper. Something that speaks to how we are feeling. Scared, disoriented, isolated. The list goes on.

Grace Killian:

It's clear we are in unprecedented times, but so many of us don't know what to say about it. Perhaps we feel some pressure to say something profound but still find ourselves at a loss for words. Perhaps we have not had a minute to think about how we are feeling about the coming changes because we are too busy with managing all of the changing plans and schedules or moving out of the dorms.

Grace Killian:

I am struck by the similarities of our moment to a pilgrimage. Some may be setting out on long journeys in the coming days, but all of us are being thrust into new unknown territory. Many people are losing most of the structures and patterns they have built into their lives.

Grace Killian:

I'm sure many, including myself, worry about the silence caused by isolation too. Here at Harvard, when you return from spring break, what will we do without the structures and the noises that fill our lives? No more walks down Mass Ave or Oxford Street. No more bustle of academic buildings or even Memorial church in the mornings. I will miss the Memorial church and morning prayers regularly I have grown so accustomed to seeing regularly.

Grace Killian:

In addition to fears about getting sick, many are confronted with fears of how they will support themselves without being able to work or how they will stay motivated and active in the midst of isolation.

Grace Killian:

These verses from the letter to the Romans normalizes this deeply human experience of not knowing what to say. We are told that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we are at a loss for words, with size that surpass our limited human abilities to express and articulate what we mean and what we feel.

Grace Killian:

God is not absent from us in tumultuous times that leave us wordless. Our inability to put words to our prayers does not separate us from God. In these uncertain times, the silence may feel deafening, but I

am certain that through this we will find new and different ways to be together in community and to support each other.

Grace Killian:

Perhaps in the silences we experienced in the coming weeks, in the place of our daily patterns, you will find new ways to be in relationship with God. In the midst of worthlessness, I am drawn to the poem entitled Word by Madeline Lingual. This poem, like the scripture, calms our fears of not knowing what to say. It assures us that silence does not separate us from God. Rather, it invites us into new ways of being, being with ourselves, being with each other, and being with God. I would like to read this poem as a closing prayer.

Grace Killian:

I, who live by words, am wordless when I try my words in prayer. All language turns to silence. Prayer will take my words and then reveal their emptiness. The stilled voice learns to hold its peace, to listen with the heart, to silence that is joy, is adoration. The self is shattered. All words torn apart in this strange pattern of time of contemplation, that in time, breaks time, breaks words, breaks me, and then in silence leaves me healed and mended. I leave, return to language, for I see through words even when all words are ending. I, who live by words, am wordless when I turn me to the word to pray. Amen.

Westley Conn:

Would you please join us wherever you might be right now in offering the Lord's prayer? Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, they 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.