

The Rev. Alanna C. Sullivan:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Alanna C. Sullivan:

And welcome to morning prayers. Will you please stand as you are able for the responsive reading, Psalm number 16, found in your black Appleton Psalter book, found on page eight. "Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust."

Congregation:

"O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art my Lord, my goodness extendeth not to thee."

The Rev. Alanna C. Sullivan:

"But to the saints that are in the Earth and to the excellent in whom is all my delight."

Congregation:

"Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god. Their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips."

The Rev. Alanna C. Sullivan:

"The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup. Thou maintainest my lot."

Congregation:

"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

The Rev. Alanna C. Sullivan:

"I will bless the Lord, who have given me counsel. My reins also instruct me in the night seasons."

Congregation:

"I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

The Rev. Alanna C. Sullivan:

"Therefore, my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth. My flesh also shall rest in hope."

Congregation:

"For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

Choir:

(singing).

The Rev. Alanna C. Sullivan:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Alanna C. Sullivan:

How wonderful it is to be with you, and also to be washed over by that transcendent music of the choir. I don't know about you, but that was one of the things that I missed most during our time apart. I'm seeing nods. So our text for today is actually from Simone Weil, from *Waiting for God*. "The capacity to pay attention to an afflicted person is something very rare, very difficult. It is nearly a miracle. Nearly all those who believe they have this capacity do not. Warmth, movements of the heart, and pity, are not sufficient." She also wrote, "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity."

So I'm not sure about where you find yourself today, but at times this week, it has felt like I have been taken under by an undertow at the start of this year. And as soon as I feel like I have my footing, the sand shifts below my feet, and each moment holds excitement and nervousness, and quite frankly, tiredness. Each of us are settling into new rhythms and new routines and are trying to find new things that can start feeling familiar, and the shape of the pandemic shifts moment by moment. And while we're trying to stay afloat, an undercurrent of this week has been an abiding sense of gratitude for me for this place and this community.

And in the whirlwind of the reopening, there have been two moments that have really stayed with me. The first was actually at home at dinner with my husband and our three year old son a few nights ago. We have started a nightly ritual where we ask each of us to share what is the best part of your day and what is the hardest part of your day. It's a toddler-fied version of the Examen. And when it was my turn, I started talking on and on and on about all the stress I was feeling about checking things off of my to-do list. And I guess I was going on a little too long, because my son gently tapped my arm and said, "Mama, I'm waiting for you." And then Henry smiled and wanted me to see and admire the turtle he had sculpted from his mashed potatoes.

And then a few minutes later, I was talking again on and on. And this time Henry was a little bit more blunt, "Stop talking, mama." Children have this unique ability to humble us and to put us in our place. But this moment at our dinner reminded me how easy it is to get distracted, to really miss what's important even if it's in plain sight of us. We can spend too much time trying to check things off of our list rather than checking in with God and those around us. And sometimes we need a gentle nudge, and sometimes we need something a little bit stronger.

And another moment that has stayed with me this week was one that I shared with a colleague. We were catching up after not seeing one another in person for the past 18 months, and during our time apart, her father had died after a long back bout with cancer. And he was a military veteran and passed away in a VA hospital and was able to be surrounded by his family, not something to be assumed nowadays. And after the doctor pronounced his death, her father was placed on a gurney and draped with Old Glory.

And as his body and her family were let out of the hospital room, Taps started to play, and everyone in the hospital stopped their work. The healthcare workers stood with their hands on their hearts and the veterans gave the military salute. The buzz of the hospital was hushed. She said she still remembers the echoes of Taps reverberating off of the hospital walls. She later came to find out that this is a tradition called the Final Salute. And as my colleague was telling me this story, she was tearing up. It meant so much to her that everyone stopped their work for a moment, even the critical work of saving lives, to pay homage to her father and his service.

Now, these two moments are not directly connected, but I think what threads them together is the importance of bearing witness to one another. Simone Weil, as she sat in her quote, "Paying attention is almost like a prayer." So many of us yearn to be seen and heard and known. We share a longing for community, a longing for hope, and a longing for meaning. And I think it is this gift of paying attention that is a particular spiritual gift of this community. It is something that I have seen time and time again, while we have remained at church and remained in relationship with one another, even though we have physically had to remain apart. So my prayer for us at the start of this new chapter is that we continue to pay attention to one another, to pay attention in an unhurried way, as Howard Thurman said.

Will you pray with me? Gracious and loving God, your eye is on the sparrow, on the mustard seed, on all the small and beautiful things in this world. In the midst of our busied and hurried lives, give us the gift of stopping, of lingering, of paying attention to the little miracles in our midst. Amen. And will you please join me in saying the prayer that Jesus taught us? 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. Please stand as you are able to sing the hymn, Come Thou Font of Every Blessing, hymn number 312 found in your crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation:
(singing).

The Rev. Alanna C. Sullivan:

Before the final blessing, I've heard there have been some questions about whether we will have morning prayers on Monday. We will not, because it is a university holiday and Labor Day. We will resume this coming Tuesday, and Dean Hampton from the divinity school will be our speaker. We hope you are able to join us. And now friends, as we go into this day, may the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you, and may the Lord give you peace. Amen.

Congregation:
Amen.