

Choir:
(singing).

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:
Good morning.

Congregation:
Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:
Welcome to Morning Prayers at the Memorial Church. Our responsorial psalm this morning is Psalm 40 on page 20 in your psalter. Please rise as you are able and make the responses in bold. "I waited patiently for You, O God. You stooped to me and heard my cry."

Congregation:
"You lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the mire and clay. You set my feet upon a high cliff and made my footing sure."

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:
"You put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God."

Congregation:
"Many shall see, and stand in awe, and put their trust in You."

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:
"In sacrifice and offering You take no pleasure. You have given me ears to hear You."

Congregation:
"Burnt-offering and sin-offering You have not required, and so I said, 'Behold, I come.'"

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:
"In the roll of the book, it is written you concerning me, 'I love to do Your will, O my God; Your law is deep in my heart.'"

Congregation:
"I proclaimed righteousness in the great congregation; behold, I did not restrain my lips, and that, O God, You know."

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:
"Your righteousness have I not hidden in my heart. I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your deliverance. I have not concealed Your love and faithfulness from the great congregation."

Congregation:

"You are the Holy One; do not withhold Your compassion from me, let Your love and Your faithfulness keep me safe forever."

Choir:
(singing).

Rakesh Khurana:

Within the university, Fall is a time of new beginnings. New students, new courses, new experiences. But it's also a time for resetting and restarting. As an immigrant, I had already learned a lot about new beginnings, restarts, and resets long before I joined the university community. A lot of what I know about new beginnings, I learned from my father, Ram Khurana. My dad was born in what is now Pakistan. He and his family were refugees during the partition in 1947. Like countless refugees before them and since, they found themselves cut off from the people, the culture, the land, that had been their home for generations. His family had to walk to India and start life all over again with nothing but what they were able to carry with them.

But that was only his first new beginning. My father's family struggled in their new home of Jalandhar in Punjab. My grandfather could not read, but he believed in education. My dad was the first in his family to go to college. He came to the United States from India in 1970 believing that tomorrow would be better than today. Like Lin Manuel Miranda's Hamilton, the young, scrappy and hungry immigrant landed in New York City knowing no one. He had only \$100 to his name and stayed in the Manhattan YMCA. He began to work several jobs to save up enough money to rent an apartment and buy airplane tickets so that my mother, my brother, and I could join him. He hoped, like millions of people had before him, that there would be a place for his family in this country; and that the American promise, a belief that nothing was out of reach for one's children if they worked hard, played fair, and had a little luck, would see them through.

Life was not easy for my father when he arrived in the United States. The first lesson I learned about starting over from my father was that instead of trying to bounce back from a setback, try to think about how to bounce forward, to be agile as you look for a new place to land. When he came to the United States, my father worked as a dishwasher, then a bookkeeper, and eventually was able to get his MBA and CPA at the City University of New York, all while working full time. But there were many setbacks along the way. Each time he lost a job, which was many times, or experienced a serious setback, he would try to figure out how to get to someplace new.

When he was applying to emigrate from India, he originally had actually applied to Uganda. However, just after he applied, Uganda stopped granting Visas to Indian nationals. So what did he do? He applied to the next country in the alphabet. And fortunately, because of the 1965 Immigration Act, he literally won the green card lottery. When he arrived in the United States, his original plan was going to go to Seattle because he thought he'd like to work for Boeing because he liked airplanes. Just to be clear, my dad did not have a job offer from Boeing. So when he missed his connection to Seattle from New York's JFK Airport, he just got on a city bus that said Manhattan, because he heard that Manhattan was a good place to find a job. He found a new place to land.

The second lesson I learned from my dad was that we should always seek to connect with people who are different from us, a lesson I am reminded of each year as we begin a new semester here on campus.

My father embraced pluralism. His perspective was that we are all interconnecting and that our differences are our universality. He was very skeptical about organized religion or any philosophy that held one group of people above another. Growing up, my parents experienced the consequences of prejudice, intolerance, and the loss of civility, when India and Pakistan's partition uprooted their respective families. My dad despised the caste system, which defined people rather than let people define themselves. He saw firsthand how these structures sapped the imaginative energies of people and were used to justify oppression and reproduce privilege.

Seeing the inter- and intra-religious conflict and strife, my dad and mom sought to connect with people different from themselves, and taught their kids to understand and respect multiple religious traditions. They exposed us to different religious texts and took us to Hindu temples, churches, synagogues, gurdwaras, mosques, and nondenominational places for meditation and reflection. They focused us on questions, not edicts; such as, on what it means to be good, who decides what is good? How can you live a life of meaning and purpose? If you asked my dad what religion he practiced, he would say Jedi.

The third lesson I learned from my dad was that hope for the future is a strength. Throughout his life, my dad had his eyes on the horizon and embraced what was new; new people, new ideas, new technology. When we were kids, my dad took out a loan and spent \$6,000 on an Apple II computer, even though he had just recently lost his job during the recession, because he wanted his kids to know how to program so that they would be ready for the future. Whatever challenges he saw in the United States; and he saw many, starting with Watergate to the end of the Vietnam war; he felt that as long as this country welcomed immigrants, it had a capacity to renew itself and become a more perfect union.

He was a living signpost of hope. He had thick, wavy hair, unwrinkled skin, and his teeth were his own. The man loved the floss. So maybe there's a fourth lesson there, floss. Well into his 70s he would challenge his grandkids to headstand contests, his sons to arm wrestling contests, and his daughters in law to running races on the beach. He remained open to new ideas and trying new things right up until his death last September. This September, as we continue to wrestle with COVID, and as we seek to make this a more just and equitable world, I'm honoring my father by holding onto his hope for the future and drawing inspiration from his many new beginnings.

Each year at Harvard, we begin again. We're fortunate to have this moment of renewal and this chance to welcome new students, staff, and faculty to our community who bring their own perspectives and who see Harvard with new eyes. I hope that in this very unusual year, instead of focusing on bouncing back from the challenges we faced last year, we can think about where we want to go and how we can bounce forward. And I hope that as we reconnect in person, we can commit to listening to and trying to understand those who are different from us. Above all, I wish for all of us to draw on examples in our own lives, as my father did for me, of people and ancestors who despite their challenges could deal with the day-to-day struggles, yet were still guided by the hope that tomorrow would be better than today.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

I invite you please to rise for the prayers. The Lord be with you. Let us pray. Oh, Heavenly Father in whom we live and move and have our being, we humbly pray Thee so to guide and govern us by Thy Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget Thee, but may remember that we are ever walking in Thy sight. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

And let us pray together now the words Jesus taught us, 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, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, amen." Our concluding hymn is number 23.

Choir:

(singing).

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace and believing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.