

Theresa Lungu:

Good morning, and welcome to morning prayers. Today's service will begin with the responsive reading from the black [inaudible 00:02:48] book, Psalm number 42 found on page 21. Please remain masked and stand as you're able to read responsively, by whole verse.

Theresa Lungu:

As a heart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God.

Congregation:

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before the face of God?

Theresa Lungu:

My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

Congregation:

These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go along with the throng.

Theresa Lungu:

And let them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, the multitude keeping festival.

Congregation:

Why are you cast down, my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?

Theresa Lungu:

Hoping God for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God.

Congregation:

Deep calls to deep in the thunder of Thy cataracts; all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me.

Theresa Lungu:

As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

Congregation:

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, my health, and my God.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Good morning.

Howard Thurman, mystic writer and American theologian and scholar, address the graduating class of 1980 at Spelman College with these words: "There is something in every one of you that waits, listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. And if you cannot hear it, you will never find whatever it is for which you are searching. And if you hear it and then do not follow it, it was better that you had never been born."

As a little boy, I was searching for the sound of the genuine. I grew up in a low country Pentecostal Church where religious traditions were normative and hate rhetoric could be heard from across the pulpit. And me being the inquisitive young boy that I was, I often questioned ecclesiastical structures within low country Pentecostalism.

In Sunday school, I was always raising my hand and challenging the Sunday school teacher. I didn't want to simply believe things because powerful men taught it to me, but rather I wanted to find out if this was truly the God of love. I was searching, searching for the sound of the genuine.

I shall never forget that it was in the month of November 2010, I was 17 years old and a senior in high school. The national convention of my Pentecostal church had commenced where I would see friends, family, brothers, and sisters from across the east coast. I was given the opportunity to preach on youth night. I was so excited to preach, but extremely nervous because God told me to preach a risky sermon. This 17 year old boy who had just begun to preach was troubled by God.

But I could hear the sound of the genuine. God started to visit me in dreams. And God did this for two weeks and God told me, "I need you to speak the truth, Calvin. Speak the truth about those who have been mistreated and abused by the church." I said, "God, you have got to be kidding me." "I need you to speak out against the patriarchy of the church, I need you to speak out and stand for the LGBTQ community who have been abused by powerful men in power." I could hear the sound of the genuine. I was tired of seeing my sisters and brothers be hurt by harmful sermons. I was tired of seeing women be mistreated, and God gave me the courage that night to hear the sound of the genuine.

How could you stand in a Pentecostal pulpit and proclaim God's love? Really Calvin? That night after preaching about God's love, the bishops escorted me out of the pulpit, took my minister's license and ordination immediately, in front of the entire convention.

I was humiliated, embarrassed and downright hurt. Aren't you the God of love? Isn't this what you wanted me to preach? But in a soothing voice, I could hear the voice of God say to me, "Follow the sound of the genuine within, you have been called to shake up places of hate and to disturb those places with love and compassion. I've called you to take a risk, to be different, to be free, and to bring hope to the least of these."

To all of you who are gathered in the sacred space this morning, God is calling out to you, too. To take a risk and trust that the voice inside you is guidance from God. Amid that noise of COVID-19 and the multiple pandemics of racism, economic instability, social and political disruption, you've come to the right place this morning. We need to find spaces like this, where we can listen for the voice of the genuine.

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

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Holy and most merciful God, help us to hear the sound of the genuine. Help us to be all that you have called us to be in your precious and loving name. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Together, let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying:

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

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. 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.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

As you're able, let us sing the hymn Lord God of Morning and of Night, number 39, found in your Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Theresa Lungu:

Blessing and laughter and loving be yours. The love of a great God who names you and holds you while the earth turns and the flowers grow. This day, this night, this moment and forever. Amen.