

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

(singing) Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for the responsive reading. Psalm 63 found in your black Appleton Psalter book, please remain masked throughout the responsive reading.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

God, you are my God. I searched for you. My soul thirsts for you. My body yearns for you as a parched and thirsty land that has no water.

Congregation:

I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Truly, your faithfulness is better than life. My lips declare your praise.

Congregation:

I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

I am sated as with a rich feast. I sing praises with joyful lips.

Congregation:

On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

For you are my help and in the shadow of your wings, I shout for joy. My soul is attached to you. Your right hand supports me. May those who seek to destroy my life, enter the depths of the earth.

Congregation:

I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

But the king shall rejoice in God, all swear by him shall exalt when the mouth of liars is stopped.

Choir:

(singing)

Laurie D. Sedgwick:

Good morning. I am still even two weeks into the semester resonating with the joy and sometimes overwhelming emotion of being out among people. Again, I have also realized that I am processing a lot of unprocessed emotion from the last 18 months of isolation and uncertainty. Maybe you are having a similar experience as you traverse your re-entry into the world. These times call for a lot of self-compassion and compassion for one another.

My inspirational text for today is from Sharon Salzberg, well-known Buddhist practitioner and teacher. She says in an article *Becoming The Ally Of All Beings*, quote, "In the Buddhist tradition, Bodhi Sophos are those who are aspiring to attain enlightenment, make a resolve. I vow to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. That's a pretty incredible vow. It means that we recognize our own liberation is intertwined with the liberation of all beings without exception. It means that rather than seeing other beings as adversaries, we must see them as colleagues in this endeavor of freedom, rather than viewing others with fear or contempt, which arises from a belief in separation. We see them as part of who we ourselves are," close quote.

I've been thinking a lot about fear. Lately, and during the last 18 months, there've been plentiful reasons for many of us to be afraid these days. A global pandemic, egregious human rights violations, our constitution and political infrastructure being jeopardized and on and on. There are certainly many macro reasons for fear, but there are also intimate, private, and personal reasons for fear, as we were forced to isolate, experienced friends and family dying and were, and still are living with daily uncertainties.

In preparation for my remarks today, I learned that some iteration of fear not is the most common phrase or command in the Bible. There is some comfort in knowing that being afraid is such a common emotion that the Bible found it necessary to repeat so often and to reassure us not to be afraid, but apart from telling us not to be afraid, how do the voices in the old and the new Testament tell us not to be afraid in most of the messages. There seems to be two things do not be afraid because we are not alone and do not be afraid because we are loved Isaiah 41:10 says, "Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

I confess to forgetting this a lot. I sat in the pews of Appleton Chapel for the first time in December of 2018. I was visiting Harvard Divinity School on an exploratory visit, which ultimately brought me here today, entering Memorial Church on that frigid morning and finding my way to Appleton Chapel, I was immediately struck with a difficult to define emotion. And after the 15 minute service, a regular attendee turned around to me and introduced himself, asking what brought me to morning prayers. As I began to formulate my response, I felt a catch my throat and embarrassingly tears coming to my eyes. And I told him I was applying to HDS and was hoping to get in. He was kind and reassuring. That was the beginning of my journey to Harvard. And from that time until now I have had periods of disbelief, elation, overwhelm, and sometimes sheer terror. In these moments of terror, I feel alone. I feel as though in a freefall, and I certainly don't feel love. I have forgotten those words from Isaiah.

I consider myself a pretty brave person, braver in some things than in others. If it has anything to do with the physical challenge, I'm all in. I've run nine marathons, including Boston, competed in a couple

of triathlons, bicycled from Oregon to Delaware, have 51 parachute jumps from perfectly good airplanes and I served my country in communications intelligence for six years in the US army. I think as long as I'm moving, I am brave, but when it comes to other things that fear surfaces. Each of us likely has fears that are unique to how we grew up, the genes we were born with and our life experiences. When I reflect on my feats of bravery, if you will, I realized there is another element apart from the physical. That other element is being part of something larger than myself and endeavoring in the company of others, human connection.

In fact, I believe it is our lack of human connection that is at the root of all, or most, of our fears. I believe that when I'm in that place of sheer terror, it is because I'm feel completely alone. In the gospel of John, he says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, for fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not been perfected in love." Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "I'm convinced that men hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don't know each other and they don't know each other because they don't communicate with each other. And they don't communicate with each other because they are separated from each other." We saw many examples of this fear being played out in violent and egregious ways over the past 18 months, the examples are too many to count.

I believe the antidote lies in the messages in the Bible to remember that we are not alone and we are loved. This message is reinforced in the Buddhist tradition as Sharon Salzberg describes, that in order for us to be free and to be free from fear, we must see that we are all connected, that we are all striving to be loved, to feel a sense of belonging. In addressing my own fear, one of the places that I feel that deep sense of interconnectedness is here in community with all of you in Memorial Church. I am deeply grateful for the reminder that I am not alone, that I am loved, that I am among brothers and sisters of faith who are also sometimes afraid and sometimes seeking to be loved, seeking to feel connected.

I would like to remind you, you are loved. You are not alone. Quoting from Philippians, "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Please stand as you are able. And won't you pray with me? Oh God, you know we are often filled with fear and foreboding. Give us courage, deepen our trust. You are a rock which nothing can shatter. On you we can place the whole weight of our lives. Amen.

And now together, let us recite the prayer that 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 give 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 forever and ever, amen. And let us sing the hymn, The Great Creator Of The World, number 190 found in your crimson Harvard hymnal. (singing).

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

This transcript was exported on Sep 16, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Now as we leave this place, but never away from God's presence, do not be afraid for you are not alone, remind ourselves that God's love is with us.