

Laurie Sedwick:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good Morning.

Laurie Sedwick:

And welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for our responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book, psalm number 81 found on page 41. Sing aloud unto God our strength. Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.

Congregation:

Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery.

Laurie Sedwick:

Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day.

Congregation:

For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob.

Laurie Sedwick:

Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee. I answered thee in the secret place of thunder. I proved thee at the waters of Meribah.

Congregation:

Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me.

Laurie Sedwick:

There shall no strange God be in thee, neither shalt thou worship any strange God.

Congregation:

I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

Choir:

(singing).

The Rev. Rita Powell:

My reflection for this morning is titled Real Hot Girl Stuff. And I will begin with two inspired texts. "Body-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody-ody. Look at how I bodied that, ate it up and gave it back. You know I'm the hottest, you ain't ever got to heat me up. I'm present when I'm absent, speaking when I'm not there." And the second: "The body is in the soul. I'm the fiery life of the essence of God. I'm the flame

above the beauty in the fields. I shine in the waters. I burn in the sun. I quicken all things vitally by an unseen, all-sustaining life."

This summer, I earned my MFA in creative writing, in poetry, and my mentor, Scott Cairns, an Orthodox poet, emphasized the practice of reading and writing and listening and speaking as participation in a great conversation, which moves backwards and forwards across time, so that when I read, I can put all that I have read in play with one another. And it is in this spirit that I have opened with words from two inspired women on fire from very different times and places. Megan Thee Stallion is a contemporary rapper from Houston, whose words come from her hip song Body. The second selection is from Hildegard von Bingen, whose feast is celebrated today, a 12th century German theologian and songwriter, a visionary woman for the church.

The words of these real hot girls, to use Megan's phrase, invite a playful dialogue about bodies, heat and the unseen essence of the sacred. The chorus of Megan's hit song says body over and over. The category is body, she says. Hildegard says the body is in the soul. So point one, the body matters. The body is held inside the soul. The body is the site of the incarnation, the place from which we may know the soul and God, and therefore must be treated as sacred. Now what the body knows and how the body knows are questions for our life of faith.

Megan says, "You know I'm the hottest. You ain't ever got to heat me up." Hildegard says, "I am the fiery life of the essence of God. I am flame. I burned in the sun." Point two, the body is hot. It's funny how we can use words like fire and flame and burning in many of our sacred texts or prayers. They show up a lot in our hymns. And somehow we're able to keep those words tame, missing the obvious point of it, which is that there is powerful, erotic, embodied energy and heat in the life of faith. I think this is something to lean into, to discover, to celebrate.

Now an obvious difference between Megan Thee Stallion and Hildegard of Bingen is that Hildegard was a sexual renunciant, a nun, which makes her body heat of a different expression than Meghan's, who is intending to speak directly about sexuality. It has been the pattern in Christianity to equate women's sexuality with wickedness. So it is especially important to bring Meghan's fierce body joy into our reflections to see if we can avoid that trap. Summarizing, the body matters. The body is hot, and bodies on fire can show us the joy of the fiery life, which is the essence of God.

Megan says, "I'm present when I'm absent, speaking when I'm not there." Hildegard says, "I quicken all things vitally by an unseen, all-sustaining life." Point three, bodies on fire can take us to the transcendent, the ecstatic, the unseen. Both women are gesturing to a vitality, a fiery erotic power, which is at once present and absent in the body, speaking when I'm not there. A self, a body, a soul on fire is both most itself and precisely at that moment finds itself dissolved into an unseen, all-sustaining life.

Hildegard writes elsewhere, "Part of the terror is to take back our own listening, to use our own voice, to see our own light." Megan says, "Look at how I bodied that, ate it up and gave it back." So the last point is this. It is an ongoing struggle for women with hot bodies to listen to their bodies, to dare to speak with and from their wisdom, and to see their own beauty. It is especially hard even today, and especially for women in Christianity. It is my deep hope and desire that we may be inspired by Hildegard of Bingen and Megan Thee Stallion to, in Hildegard's words, take back our own listening, use our own

voice and see our own light, such that we may translate what our bodies know and share it, to say with pride, in Meghan's words, "Look at how I bodied that, ate it up and gave it back." Amen.

Would you pray with me in the prayer today for Hildegard. God of all times and seasons, of all bodies on fire, give us grapes that we, after the example of your servant Hildegard, may both know and make known the joy and jubilation of being part of your creation through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Please stand as you are able and let us together 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 as 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, the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Congregation:

Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done as 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, the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Laurie Sedwick:

Let us sing the hymn O Thou Great Friend to All Of Us Below, number 230, found in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

Laurie Sedwick:

Let us now go forth, oh Lord our God, to the work of another day, surrounded by thy wonderful loving kindnesses, still pledged to thy loyal service, still standing in thy strength and not our own. Amen.