

Anna Burnham:

Good morning, and welcome to morning prayers at Memorial Church. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book, psalm 103 found on page 52. Please remain masked and stand as you are able, to read responsibly by the whole verse. Bless the Lord, oh my soul, all my being, his holy name.

Congregation:

Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and do not forget all of his bounties.

Anna Burnham:

He forgives all your sins, heals all your diseases.

Congregation:

He redeems your life from the pit, surrounds you with steadfast love and mercy.

Anna Burnham:

The Lord executes righteous acts and judgements for all who are wronged.

Congregation:

He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the children of Israel.

Anna Burnham:

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.

Congregation:

He will not contend forever, or nurse his anger for all time.

Anna Burnham:

He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor has he requited us according to our inequities.

Congregation:

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.

Anna Burnham:

As east is far from west, so far has he removed our sins from us.

Choir:

(singing)

Anya Bernstein Bassett:

Our scripture this morning is from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 12, verses 3-4 and 6-8. "For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has

assigned. For as in one body, we have many members and not all the members have the same function. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, prophecy in proportion to faith, ministry in ministering, the teacher in teaching, the exhorter in exhortation, the giver in generosity, the leader in diligence, the compassionate in cheerfulness."

Good morning. It is a joy to be back in Memorial Church. One of my favorite parts of my job as director of undergraduate studies is mentoring students and alumni as they discern their vocation or calling. Our conversations are endlessly fascinating. And it is an incredible privilege to walk with students. As to paraphrase the mission of Harvard College, they determine what their gifts and talents are and think about how they can best serve the world.

But our conversations can be challenging when students discern that they are called to work that is not well rewarded financially or with social prestige. Sometimes they worry that by following the path that feels right to them they are letting down family and friends, and also letting down Harvard. They understand that as much as we say we value care and community, far more often we recognize and reward those who lead, who innovate, who make money. I love working with all my students, but I particularly appreciate those who struggle with this challenge, as I struggle with it myself. It has taken me many years to become comfortable with the idea that my own calling is primarily to teach, mentor and build community in the program I run here.

During the pandemic, we received the message that we should meet this historic moment by rising to the challenge, being creative, innovating in order to make remote teaching and programming not only as good, but better than before. We'll try new approaches. We'll stretch ourselves. We'll come out of this stronger. Some faculty members achieved incredible things, flipping their classrooms and finding new ways to transfix their students over enormous distances. But I wasn't one of those faculty members. We certainly tried. We learned how to make PowerPoint, slideshow. We hosted receptions on virtual platforms and talks on Zoom. And I spent hours creating a virtual trivia contest. Seven students attended. For me, as for many of my colleagues, the main lesson of online teaching is that I hope I never have to do it again.

But a shift happened in the spring semester when we were allowed to meet with students in the Cambridge area outside and at a social distance. I took walks with students and gathered with groups on lawns and in parking lots. Being with my students, able to look into their eyes as we talked, allowed me to more fully witness their experience. And their gratitude at being able to connect with a caring Harvard adult for the first time in a year powerfully reminded me of the importance of the emotional work we do here at the college. The pandemic was humbling to me as I was once again reminded that my call is not to dazzle, but to connect. It was also clarifying. That's why I'm not speaking on Micah 6:8, the traditional scripture for talks about humility, but on Romans 12, which addresses both humility, don't think too highly of yourself, and also calling. As while we have many members with different gifts, we are all one body.

The work of getting to know our students as individuals, listening to their ideas and hopes and fears, literally walking with and during their time at Harvard and beyond is a crucial part of the body of our work here. To be sure, it is only one part of our body. In the past year, we saw the impact of scholarship

produced at Harvard on vaccine research, on initiatives to reshape policing and incarceration, and on the production of thought-provoking works of art to help us interpret the world we are living in. Students and alumni healed the sick and protested injustice. I am proud to be part of a university where those things happened, and to be working with people who are making the change that our world so desperately needs.

But we have long talked about the importance of research and leadership at Harvard, and we pay less attention to the work of teaching, mentoring, and building genuine, not virtual, communities. So I wonder in this moment that president Bacow described as an opportunity to make our university kinder, gentler, and more humane, whether it might be time to embrace more fully the members of our university body who do that work.

Harvard is a far more kinder and gentler place now than it was when I see started graduate school here exactly 30 years ago. But in losing our human connections with each other, the pandemic reminded me of how important they are and led me to wonder if we can return not only as good, but better than before. We can more fully recognize the work of caring for others in building community, and we can offer more security and status to those who do it. I wonder whether that would help us to become the university we want to be.

Will you stand as you are able and pray with me? Lord, please be with us and bless us as we travel through this year. Help us use this moment, not only to do great things, but in the words of Mother Teresa, to do small things with great love. Help us to understand the importance of both. And now let us pray 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 to temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Congregation:

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 to temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Anna Burnham:

Please remain standing and remain masked as we sing the hymn Be Thou My Vision, number 291, found in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

Anna Burnham:

The Lord be with you. The service has ended. Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.