

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Good morning. Welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for the responsive reading found in your black Appleton Psalter book, Psalm 133. Please remain masked throughout the responsive reading.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

How and pleasant it is that brothers dwell together.

Congregation:

It is like fine oil on the head running down into the beard, the beard of Aaron. It comes down over the collar of his robe.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Like the dew of Hermon that falls upon the mountains of Zion, there the Lord ordained blessing, everlasting life. You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Stephanie Paulsell:

Good morning. A reading from Psalm 19. The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech nor are their words. Their voice is not heard, yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.

The last time I spoke in this church, the ministers and the musicians were here but the pews were empty, and I can't tell you how much it means to see you all sitting there. There's a wonderful scene in Arthur Kleinman's memoir *The Soul Of Care* in which professor Kleinman recalls a childhood memory of a boy his age, who was unafraid to show his care for others, even though it was precisely his capacity for kindness that made him a target of the neighborhood bullies. Arthur remembers his own 11 year old self, more prone to brawling than gentleness. Being fascinated by the other boy's tenderness, and wondering as Arthur puts it, there might be a way to be like him, and yet still be myself.

Last year when the campus was close to empty and our classes went wholly online. I found myself wanting to teach classes that went deeply into one person's life and work rather than classes driven by an idea or a theme that ranged across the work of many. There was something consoling about getting to know one person well with all their contradictions and something reassuring about reading through the whole of someone's work, rather than reading only their best or most well-known writings. And there was something instructive about living for a whole semester in one person's world and understanding the circumstances, both personal and historical that shaped their questions and commitments and ways of responding to the world around them. The stated purpose of these classes was scholarly, to learn more about the figures who had made significant contributions to the history of religion or who were underappreciated as religious thinkers.

But the way the pandemic stripped things down helped me be more honest about the fact that intertwined with the scholarly questions of the class was Arthur's question, is there a way to be like this person and still be myself? I'll never be a genius like Virginia Woolf, but is there something about her uncommonly close attention to the mystery of existence that I can learn to emulate? I'll never be a religious reformer like Teresa of Avila, but is there something about her vision of a community that breaks down the hierarchies that structure our lives and creates new space for contemplation that I can bring into my communities? I'll never be a monk like Thomas Merton, but is there something about how solitude drew him more deeply into the life of the world and its pain that I can follow in this time of pandemic and imposed solitude.

This is semester I'm continuing with this I'm spending my days moving back and forth with my students between Teresa of Avila in the 16th century and Thomas Merton in the 20th. Born four centuries apart, they nevertheless have very similar projects and both live in worlds wracked by violence brutality and change. Teresa's Spanish 16th century was a time of religious controversy and religious violence and the brutal beginnings of colonialism and the transatlantic trade in human beings. Merton's American 20th century was marked by the violence of Jim Crow, the struggle for civil rights, the war in Vietnam and the movement against it. Both gather up the spiritual inheritance of the centuries before them and find modern language to express it in that helps them bring it as a resource into their own times. Both are constantly experimenting with new forms of community, new ways of living that make it possible to explore our human capacity for doing justice and loving mercy and walking humbly with our God, and they change.

Reading straight through their work, or a lot of from beginning to end, we see them struggling to find the right words, the right forms. We see them contradicting themselves. We see them struggling with shame and guilt, and we see them being transformed over time. The popular young nun who is sometimes physically disabled by her ecstasy, becomes a fearless reformer, teaches a path toward God that draws us deeper into care for others. The arrogant young monk who ostentatiously turns his back on the world and all the mistakes he has made in it, finds that his life in the monastery and the hermitage doesn't shield him from the world or the world from him, but reorients him to the world, teaching him to love it and to respond to the claim it makes on his life.

Both Teresa and Thomas Merton teach the contemplative life, not as a set of extraordinary experiences, but as Merton puts it as life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. Both insist that living in this way, conscious of our shared humanity, seeking the presence of God, and as Teresa puts it someplace very deep within is a human capacity that belongs to every person being fully awake to its possibilities, Teresa says is, what we are made for. Is there a way to be like them and still be myself? I don't actually know that I want to keep asking.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

All those who are able, please stay in prayer. Holy God, in a world of uncertainty in a world of fragmentation, how can we pattern our sales, after those leaders and conduits and still be ourselves? Grace, us with your love, compassion, and assistance as we continue to strive to be conduits of love, peace, and justice. Now let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples when they asked him, master, teach us how to pray. Our father, which 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 forever and ever. Amen. Now let us sing Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise found in your hymnal, your crimson Harvard hymnal, number 203.

This transcript was exported on Sep 29, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Congregation:

(singing)

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

May the grace of our Lord and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you and you and you and may Christ's love continue to surround you throughout this day, amen.