

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Good morning. Welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for the responsive reading, Psalm 18, found in your black Appleton Psalter Book. Please remain masked throughout the responsive reading.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

I adore you, oh Lord, my strength.

Congregation:

Oh Lord, my crag, my fortress, my rescuer, my God.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

My rock in whom I seek refuge, my shield, my mighty champion, my haven.

Congregation:

Ropes of death encompassed me, torrents of Belial terrified me.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Ropes of Sheol encircled me. Snares of death confronted me.

Congregation:

In my distress I called on the Lord, cried out to my God. In his temple, he heard my voice. My cry to him reached his ears.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

You have given me the shield of your protection. Your right hand has sustained me. Your care has made me great.

Congregation:

You have let me strive on freely. My feet have not slipped.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

For this I sing your praise among the nations, Lord, and hymn your name.

Congregation:

He accords great victories to his king, keeps faith with his anointed, with David and his offspring forever.

Choir:

(singing)

David von Behren:

Over the last 18 months, I'm sure you found, as I have, that there are many lessons to be learned from the rollercoaster of this pandemic. Family and friends matter more than ever. Wealth inequality is

growing and it affects us all. Taking time for one's self is important. Today, I'd like to share one of the biggest lessons I've learned throughout this pandemic, thoughtfulness in our work, art, craft and interactions. I'm not saying that we weren't thoughtful and caring before, but I think I speak for us all when I say that there is a renewed sense of life for the things that we took for granted, as we continue to return to our work.

My friend Jill taught me this. Jill is a mother, a musician, a source of light to all she knows. Over the time of lockdown, jill found recordings I had posted on social media and would send me thoughtful comments of the pieces of which she had listened. She had a history with cancer in recent years, and up until December of 2020, she was in remission. Unfortunately the day before Christmas, she was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. Because her cancer would progress quickly, her husband arranged a surprise concert and family get together this past February. Her daughter sent me pieces that she loved for me to play on violin, and also some of the organ pieces that were close to her heart.

Without her knowing her husband, children, and myself, had the opportunity to create a surprise concert for Jill's half birthday, knowing that because of the cancer progression, that it would make the most sense to celebrate early on when we had the chance. As she walked into St. Benedict's Abbey in Atchison, Kansas this past February, she was surprised to be surrounded by loved ones who had driven and flown in from around the country. She took a seat in the abbey and closed her eyes before the concert, just soaking in the moments of togetherness.

Prior to the pandemic, I had noticed that the busyness of the world allowed me to fall into rhythms where I'd quickly churn out music without time to fully think about the intentions I would hope to convey through my craft. I realized that this went beyond music making, but into every facet of my daily life. It was in those moments of music-making for my new friend, Jill and her family, in that surprise concert that I realized the true beauty of what matters in this life. Jill's love for life, for music, for enjoying the moment, taught me a valuable lesson. Perhaps we need less of the busy and more of the intentional and thoughtful in our lives.

Jill has helped me to fall in love with my call as a musician on a deeper level, amidst the darkness she fights with her diagnosis. She is always full of life and light and values each moment. I wrote to Jill the other day, and I said, "When I grow up, I want to be like you." If there is a bigger lesson for us to all learn, it's a prayer that we will not learn to take the joys of life for granted again, but to fully absorb, breathe and live into them, fleeting as they may be. To savor every note of music-making, enjoy every conversation with our loved ones, and to not sweat the small stuff. We will never fully understand the struggles with which others have had to endure throughout this pandemic, the loss of loved ones, jobs, homes, or health. Today, I challenge you to celebrate the small joys. As we know, it can all change in an instant.

In the words of Maya Angelou, "I've had rainbows in my clouds." I've had a lot of clouds, but I have had so many rainbows. Dear friends, let us go be rainbows in someone else's cloud. Let us pray the words of today's anthems, dear friends. I thank you, Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who kept me safely through the night and brought me to the morning light. Be with me through this day, I pray, and keep me safe from Satan's sway, that all I think or do or say please only you, my strength

and stay. Into your hands I now commend my body and soul until lights end. Your presence keeps me safe from harm until I lie in Jesus' arms. Amen.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

All who are able, please stand for the Lord's Prayer. Now let us pray the Lord's Prayer that Jesus taught his disciples when they asked him, "Master, teach us to pray." 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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. 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. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Now let us sing together Hymn number 76, Great is God's Faithfulness, found in your Harvard crimson hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

As you leave this place, may you never away from God's presence, as you leave this gathering, but never away from God's mercy, may you be reminded of the beauty of life. May you celebrate the small joys. May the peace of God be with you. Amen.