

Theresa Lungu:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Theresa Lungu:

And welcome to morning prayers. Today's service will begin with the responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book, Psalm number 33 found on page 17. Please stand as you're able to read responsibly by whole verse. Sing forth, oh you righteous, to the Lord. It is fit that the upright acclaim him.

Congregation:

Praise the LORD with the lyre; with the ten-stringed harp sing to Him.

Theresa Lungu:

Sing him a new song. Play sweetly with shouts of joy.

Congregation:

For the word of the LORD is right; His every deed is faithful.

Theresa Lungu:

He loves what is right and just; the earth is full of the Lord's faithful care.

Congregation:

By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made, by the breath of His mouth, all their host.

Theresa Lungu:

He heaps the ocean waters like a mound, stores the deep in vaults.

Congregation:

Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world dread Him.

Theresa Lungu:

For He spoke, and it was; He commanded, and it endured.

Congregation:

The LORD frustrates the plans of the nations, brings to naught the designs of the peoples.

Theresa Lungu:

What the Lord plans endures forever, what He designs, for ages on end.

Choir:

(singing)

Terrence Murphy, M.D.:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Terrence Murphy, M.D.:

I'll begin with a short quote by Bishop Desmond Tutu. Our maturity will be judged by how well we are able to agree to disagree, and yet to continue to love one, care for one another, and see the greater good of the other.

I'm grateful and humbled to be here today. I first visited Mem Church during my freshman orientation. And over the years, I've never tired of this sanctuary's simple elegance. I'd be fibbing if I denied running to the internet as soon as I got an invitation to speak. When I discovered that today would be Desmond Tutu's 90th birthday, I knew the stars were aligned in my favor. You see, I've been a fan of the good Bishop for decades. My wife, Betty, who is here today, and I toured Cape Town in late January, 2020, clueless that our world was about to be turned upside down. We visited St. George's Cathedral where Tutu, Africa's first Black Archbishop, led demonstrations against apartheid. Some of us here watched that monumental struggle play out on the world stage.

Mandela, de Klerk, Robben Island, the ANC, divestment, truth and reconciliation, and Tutu all became household words for us. Harvard students did this institution proud with their demands to boycott South Africa's apartheid regime, and they are echoed by today's impassioned demands for fossil fuel divestment. When Mandela was released from prison and elected President, dismantling the country's nuclear stockpile in one of his first official acts, we were thrilled. Standing at the back of St. George's on the morning that we visited, I recalled a Tutu quote that I'd come across years earlier. 'When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land.'

Flying home from South Africa, we had no idea that a killer virus we'd soon know as COVID-19 was already spreading around the globe. Changing flights at Heathrow, we blithely walked through the airport's crowded terminals, unmasked, unconcerned, and unaware. There have been so many twists and turns in the past 20 months. I felt that we had finally found our way out of this crisis when we received our COVID shots back in February. Naively I thought that everybody would be as grateful and as relieved as I was. I worked on the front lines during the darkest days of the AIDS scourge around the time of Tutu's anti-apartheid activism. My colleagues and I prayed for life-saving treatment as we helplessly watched our patients die. And when the game-changing drugs finally did arrive, we were awestruck by those same patients, as they sprang back to life like modern-day Lazarus's.

For me, the COVID vaccine promised to be equally miraculous. Listening to today's anti-vaxxers, I hear echoes of those 1980s folks who scapegoated gays, Haitians, drug users, and even hemophiliacs in the name of religion. Early in South Africa's colonial days, a version of religious liberty was used to sanctify White supremacy. And today we see it used by some as cover for the storming of our Capitol building, the fatal kneeling on George Floyd's neck, building border walls, and cries of stop the steal. Tutu put it well. Religion is like a knife. It can be used to slice bread or to stab someone in the back.

Tutu recently appeared in public to get his COVID vaccine. Reading the news, I crazily pictured myself giving him his jab and asking him how we might effectively mediate the forces that are tearing

our country apart. I'm afraid he'd simply shed a tear and shake his head in sadness, but maybe he'd see the panic in my eyes and repeat another of my favorite quotes to make me feel a little better. There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.

Theresa Lungu:

Please stand as you're able and let us pray. Lord of mercy, Lord of goodness, we lift our eyes onto you for love and for guidance. And together, let us recite the Lord's prayer 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 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.

Let us sing the hymn To God with Sing, number 30 in the crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

Theresa Lungu:

As we go forth into this day, blessing and laughter and loving be yours. The love of the great God who names you and holds you while the earth turns and the flowers grow, this day, this night, this moment, and forever. Amen.