

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 121, found on page 61. Please remain masked and stand as you are able to read responsively by the whole verse. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

Congregation:

"My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and Earth."

Anna Burnham:

"He will not suffer thy foot to be moved. He that keepeth thee will not slumber."

Congregation:

"Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

Anna Burnham:

"The Lord is thy keeper. The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand."

Congregation:

"The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night."

Anna Burnham:

"The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul."

Congregation:

"Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore."

Choir:

(singing)

Richard Parker:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Richard Parker:

First, my reading from Psalm 37 verses 1-9: "Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong, for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the Lord and do good. Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. He will make your righteous ways shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. Do not fret when bad people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Turn from wrath, it

leads only to evil, for those who are evil will be destroyed. But those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land."

Let me start my little talk this morning by reading, and I promise you not singing acapella, the first stanza of a hymn that I as a boy growing up always loved. Some of you may know it. The hymn is I Sing a Song of the Saints of God. "I sing a song of the saints of God, patient and brave and true, who toiled and fought and lived and died for the Lord they loved and knew. And one was a doctor and one was a queen and one was a shepherdess on the green. They were all of them saints of God, and I mean, God helping, to be one too."

Now. I'm an Episcopalian. One of that small group of mainline Protestants my Jewish wife knowingly refers to as God's frozen people, and this is a very Episcopal hymn, although it's actually in origin an Anglican hymn, but that's another story for another time.

I use it to open my homily to say something important about evangelizing, which all Christians are called to do. More important in this terrible time in which we live, evangelizing for justice, which only some of us apparently feel called to do even today 2000 years after the death of Jesus Christ.

The Rev. Richard Parker:

I first learned that hymn in my father's church. My father was an Episcopal clergyman for 52 years in the late 1950s, about the same time that the sin of racism was once again being put before the white American majority, of which I was then one tiny member. I was seven years old when Brown vs the Board of Education was decided, and so it was the first halting and violence-haunted attempts to desegregate America's schools that shaped who I would become.

I was growing up in California, and so when I was 10, the televised images of young African-American boys and girls barely older than I was trying to start school in Little Rock, a simple act that required calling out the United States Army, stunned me.

Most of us, I now understand, begin to form our own moral imaginations in adolescents. We're taught rudiments by our parents, but we make those values our own only by sifting through their teaching and what we experience day to day. Television in the 1950s played an enormous role in redefining what daily experience meant.

Now, my father was a low-church, high-social-gospel Episcopalian. That may be to some of you a vague and rather esoteric jumble of words, so let me restate it through my mother, who once explained to me that my father's understanding of the Holy Trinity was that it meant Father, Son, and Franklin Roosevelt. We were in short, social-gospel Christians.

In an era now when a quarter of Americans say they have no formal religious identity or affiliation, and nearly half of young people say the same, the fact that my social-gospel Christianity has been eclipsed in the public square by the hatefulness of what is known to too many as the Christian Right appalls me. The

test of being Christian in the tradition in which I was raised is neither about political party nor political ideology.

And so let me be clear. My father's inclusion of FDR and the Holy Trinity was neither a partisan nor an ideological act, but a fundamental indelible, inescapable, religious insistence that Christians like me and believers, whatever your faith, live our faith by word and action into this world.

I descended, despite my birth in California, from a long line of New Englanders. Five years ago, I was in Florence, Italy, where I went to visit the grave of my ancestor, the Reverend Theodore Parker. Theodore Parker was one of the Secret Six here in Boston who had financed John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, hoping to spark an uprising that would ultimately lead to the destruction of slavery. It failed in its immediate aims, and Parker fled America with his wife, knowing that he'd be hanged like Brown if he stayed. He died in Florence, his gravestone paid for by another abolitionist, his old friend Frederick Douglass.

I didn't know this story of Theodore Parker when I first began singing I Sing a Song of the Saints of God, but I would ask you to let me read the hymn's last stanza. "They lived not only in ages past; there are hundreds of thousands still. The world is bright with the joyous saints who love to do Jesus's will. You can meet them in school or in lanes or at sea, in church or in trains or in shops or tea, for the saints of God are folk just like me. And I need to be one too."

Let us pray. God, on this gray morning, in this grave time for our nation, when we are denied the leaders that we need, help us hear and absorb and be nourished by these words written by your courageous and faithful son Reinhold Niebuhr, who lived in and fought in a time still darker than our own. "Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved by faith. And nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we must be saved by love." Amen.

Anna Burnham:

Please stand as you are able and together let us recite the words that Jesus taught us.

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 into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Anna Burnham:

Let us sing the hymn O For a Closer Walk With God, number 292 in your crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

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

Anna Burnham:

The Lord be with you.

Anna Burnham:

The service is ended. Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.