

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 Salter book, Psalm 126, found on page 63. Please remain masked and stand as you are able to read responsibly by the whole verse. "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream."

Congregation:

Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the heathen, the Lord hath done great things for them.

Anna Burnham:

"The Lord have done great things for us, where of we are glad."

Congregation:

Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south.

Anna Burnham:

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

Congregation:

He that goeth fourth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

Choir:

(singing)

Dr. Ellen Williams, M.D.:

Good morning. Thank you for being here and, oh my goodness, thank you to the choir for that amazing music. Thornton Wilder concludes the bridge of San Luis Rey with the following words, "We ourselves shall be loved for a while and forgotten, but the love will have been enough. All those impulses of love return to the love that made them. Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living and a land of the dead, and the bridge is love. The only survival, the only meaning." Once a week, I board the [T 00:08:14] to go to the best volunteer job in the world. I don a pink jacket and a thin blanket to cover the jacket and, in the COVID era, goggles and a fresh face mask, and then start my shift in the MGH special care nursery as a baby cuddler.

When I signed up to do this a few years ago, I viewed it as performing a service, paying back the special care nursery for the care given to my youngest son when he was born six weeks early, 30 years ago. Instead, as so often happens with service, it turned out to be much more of a service to me. For most of my adult life, I worked as a physician, hospitals in general, and the MGH in particular, are home to me. I'm comfortable with, and maybe even drawn to the monitors, the tubes, the lines, and all the paraphernalia that goes with modern medicine. When I first started baby cuddling, I found myself automatically examining those monitors, the feeding tubes, the notes and instructions on the wall

around the baby's crib, all those clues that might lead to an understanding of the baby's medical condition, age, or reason for being there.

But none of that is why I'm there. None of that is mine to know or act upon. My job, and my only job is, to hold those little humans for three brief hours at the start of their lives, and to pour out as much love, comfort, security, and tenderness as the human touch and the human voice can provide. They will never know me. I will never know them, but for those three hours, I need them to feel the love of the universe, however I can conjure it up. It took a little while to put aside my medical curiosity and just be fully immersed in the moment. Once I was able to do that, though, the whole experience shifted for me. Holding the baby is not transactional and comes with no connection to the past or future; just pure transcendent love.

It is humbling to think that at 67 years of age, I am still learning these same lessons over and over, but there you have it. Less is often more. It really is more blessed to give than to receive, to love than to be loved. I have to set aside my hyperactive brain for those few blissful hours to fully embrace the experience of just being there for the baby. We can't do it all the time and we all can't do it at the same time. Thank goodness the nurses in the special care nursery are still worrying about the lines and tubes and monitors that I ignore.

I know all of you have found these moments of transcendent love in lots of other places. In nature, with friends, with your children, with your grandchildren or with other family members. I suppose if I tried to say what the take home message of all this is, it's just that the hope that we can all be open to these moments when they find us, to be able to put aside our own worries, our own intellectual musings, our own judgements, even our own expertise, to melt into the experience of just plain love for a stranger, an animal, a friend, a landscape, or a baby. The bridge is love, the own only survival, the only meaning. Let us pray.

Help us to remember every day that in the end love is everything. Love of ourselves. Love of our friends and neighbors. Love for those strangers that fate sins our way. Love for those with whom we disagree. Please help us to love more fully in all our thoughts, words, and deeds. Now, please join me in praying the Lord's prayer. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy named, 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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thing is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Anna Burnham:

Please stand as you are able and together let us sing the hymn He Leadeth Me, O Blessed Thought, number 224 found in your Crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

Anna Burnham:

The Lord be with you.

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

Congregation:

And also with you.

Anna Burnham:

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