

Anna Burnham:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Anna Burnham:

And welcome to morning prayers at Memorial Church. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the black Appleton Salter book. Psalm 8, found on page four. Please remain masked and stand as you are able to read responsively by the whole verse.

Anna Burnham:

Oh Lord, our Lord. How majestic is your name throughout the earth. You who have covered the heavens with your splendor.

Congregation:

From the mouths of infants and sucklings you have founded strength on account of your foes. To put an end to enemy and avenger.

Anna Burnham:

When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place.

Congregation:

What is man, that you have been mindful of him, mortal man that you have note of him.

Anna Burnham

That you have made him little less than divine and adored him with glory and majesty.

Congregation:

You have made him master of your handiwork, laying the world at his feet.

Anna Burnham:

Sheep and oxen, all of them, the wild beasts, too.

Congregation:

The birds of the heavens, the fish in the sea, whatever travels the paths of the seas.

Anna Burnham:

Oh, Lord, our Lord how majestic is your name throughout the earth.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Steve Watson:

good. Morning friends, I'm Steve Watson. Good to be with you. Somewhere else I'd be tempted to say, give it up for the musicians. I suppose I just did. It was beautiful. Thank you, all.

When I was a child, my favorite tree was the fast growing maple behind our house. It had been planted to celebrate the birth of one of my brothers. By the time I was a teenager, it towered over our center of our yard, where we could sit under its shade and where I could climb up high to escape whatever boredom or tensions lay below. That tree is gone now. It had fallen ill. It was removed by the next owners of the property. I have a different favorite tree now, a big old oak tree, atop Quarry Hill across the river from here where Brighton and Brookline converge. Sometimes when I need to rest or think I sit under it, or I climb up into a crook made by its lowermost ranch and lean into its old rough strength.

This time of year, the trees of New England are not just some of the older living things we can see, they're some of the most beautiful as well. And my hope today is simple. It's to encourage you to look at and touch and even learn from the trees you see this week. I share this advice and imitation of my greatest teacher and guide, Jesus of Nazareth, who spoke often of trees and flowers and the rest of the natural world as our teacher. Today's reading from the gospel of Luke, "Jesus said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat or about your body, what you'll wear. For life is more than food and the body is more than clothing. Consider the lilies, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, and I tell you even Solomon and all his glory was not clothed like one of these. Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, give alms, make purses for yourselves that don't wear out an unfailing treasure in heaven where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'"

Jesus gives us a teaching of contrasts two beauties, two ways of living, two kingdoms, two treasures, all wisdom we can receive through looking at the lilies. If it's springtime in Galilee, or if it's in New England in the fall through considering the trees. Trees are more beautiful than anything than we can make from them. Even Solomon in all his glory, which is likely an indirect way of to the temple of Jerusalem first built by Solomon. The most extraordinary human built structure Jesus and his followers had ever seen cannot compare to the beauty of the lilies. You cannot improve on what God has made.

This is true of trees and it's true of people too. You cannot improve upon the beautiful human God has made you. No toiling nor no spinning, no surgery or skincare or achievements or fortune can fundamentally improve on the glory of who God made you. Look at a beautiful tree today, friends, and ask God for the insight to see the extraordinary beauty of all that God has made, yourself included. Two trees don't know how to worry, and it's not because they don't know things. We are learning trees know a lot of things. They know how to share resources with one another, to communicate in response to threats, but they don't know how to worry. It took a lot of evolution to make us fear and worry the way

that we do. That has a few benefits, but an awful lot of misery that comes with it, too. So look at the trees, take a deep breath and perhaps ask God to let go of the worries you don't need to carry today.

Lastly, trees grow and flourish and produce. They make shade and habitats and oxygen and food, but they do not strive. They have no self-improvement projects. They are in a sense satisfied with who and what they are and with their capacity, as they are, to bless the earth with their gifts. The trees, Jesus said, they point us to a less capitalist vision of the kingdom of God and more what my community calls a beloved community vision of the kingdom of God, toward a natural one, toward an economy of sharing and abundance, toward a sustainable vision of contentment and generosity. Jesus' vision of the kingdom, the beloved community. It's a vision of life with God and neighbor and earth in which we hope and trust that the divine is to us, a loving parent, who is kindly with us always, in which we can let go of our lusts and longings to always have more and more and more, in which the great treasure of our lives can be the non-competitive giving and receiving of our most generous love.

Look at the trees, friends, take a breath and ask God to learn the contentment, the enoughness, the loving generosity that they embody to the whole earth and ask for the wisdom to make that ours this week, this life as well. Pray with me, please. God of the trees, God of the vision of beloved community, we ask today for the wisdom of the trees that we can see and preserve the beauty of all that you've made, that we can be more free from our anxieties, and that we can embrace more peaceful, contented, generous lives in the name of all that is holy, which for me is both Jesus and the trees, amen.

Anna Burnham:

Please stand as you are able and together, let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught us, 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 give 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 and forever. Amen.

Anna Burnham:

Together, let us sing the hymn, We Sing for all the Unsung Saints, number 85 found in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing).

Anna Burnham:

Just like the trees on this beautiful fall day, may we all go into the rest of our day with our feet firmly rooted and our eyes looking skyward. The service is ended. Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.