

Cheyenne Boon:

Good morning-

Congregation:

Good morning.

Cheyenne Boon:

... and welcome to morning prayers. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book, Psalm number 37, found on page 19. Please remain masked and stand as you are able to read responsively by whole verse. "Fret not yourself because of the wicked. Be not envious of wrongdoers ..."

Congregation:

"For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green earth."

Cheyenne Boon:

"Trust in the Lord and do good so you will dwell in the land and enjoy security."

Congregation:

"Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart."

Cheyenne Boon:

"The wicked borrows and cannot pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives."

Congregation:

"For those blessed by the Lord shall possess the land, but those cursed by Him shall be cut off."

Cheyenne Boon:

"I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging bread."

Congregation:

"He is ever giving liberally and lending, and his children become a blessing."

Cheyenne Boon:

"Depart from evil and do good, so shall you abide forever."

Congregation:

"For the Lord loves justice. He will not forsake His saints."

Cheyenne Boon:

"The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord. He is their refuge in the time of trouble."

Congregation:

"The Lord helps them and delivers them. He delivers them from the wicked and saves them because they take refuge in Him."

Cheyenne Boon:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing)

Susan Hayward:

Good Monday morning, everyone. Our reading this morning comes from the day's lectionary, the selection from the Hebrew scriptures, Genesis book 24.

"Abraham was now very old, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. He said to the senior servant in his household, 'Put your hand under my thigh. I want you to swear by the Lord that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac.'

"The servant asked him, 'What if the woman is unwilling to come back here with me? Shall I then take your son to the country you came from?' Abraham said, 'The God of heaven who brought me out of my father's household and my native land, and who spoke to me and promised me an oath, saying, "To your offspring I will give you this land," that God will send an angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son there. If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there.' So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore oath to him concerning this matter." The word of our God.

The week before last, I went home to Minnesota. Perhaps like me, many of you are not from Cambridge, this city that sits upon land inhabited by the Massachusett people, but came here from another place. And by now, even if you are new to New England, maybe you've begun to feel like it is home. How could you not love it here this time of year, when the leaves burn gloriously in a fire that does not consume them? And yet it's not really home, right? There's something that happens in my soul when I return to Minnesota, something that tells me this is home, the place that formed me.

Earlier in Genesis we're told that God created us from the dirt of the land, and that's what I feel when I return home, that I am made of the very soil of this place. The word Minnesota is a Dakota term, meaning sky-tinted water, so named because of the many waterways, the lakes and the rivers, that were left by glaciers millions of years ago.

I grew up on those sky-colored waters. As a teenager, I learned how to read the surface of a river to know what lies beneath it and so where to navigate my canoe safely, just as well as I learned how to safely navigate a car across a winter street covered in black ice. I grew up on wild rice and lefse,

casseroles and Prince. I grew up on the ethereal call of a loon echoing across the lake and the sight of a wolf loping noiselessly across a prairie, both so beautiful it will break your heart. I'm Minnesotan.

But then again, though born and raised in Minnesota, I'm not in all senses indigenous to the lands. My ancestors came here several hundred years ago from Europe. They settled, often in ways involving violence and theft, in the lands of native inhabitants with whom they did not intermingle. And so when I read these words of Abraham to his servant in Genesis, I feel a pain of recognition. This story, after all, is a story of what today we call settler colonialism. Abraham is called by God to a land where he settled, assured by God that the land is now his, and he refuses to mix with the native Canaanite people whom he deems inferior. Oh these awful stories we inherit. What do we do with those that seem to bless a way of relating to people in place that we know is not right? How do we find our way to God through them?

When I was home in Minnesota, I drove past one of the camps of the indigenous-led protests against the construction of line three, a pipeline pumping tar-sands oil across the states and its precious waterways. The pipeline threatens the health of water and land and so threatens our collective future.

Last summer, water protectors across Minnesota led protests and prayers to stop line-three construction, and they were urgent, bold, and polarizing. The protests were led in large part by the Initianabi people, who themselves came from out east to settle in the land of sky-tinted water hundreds of years ago, led by a vision from their creator of a sacred place where food grows from water: wild rice. The week before last, the protest camp I passed was dotted with just a few remaining teepees and REI tents, quieter now that line-three construction is nearly completed, the oil now flowing and sadly already spilling, darkening the sky water.

This land Minnesota and its waters, they're sacred to me too. I share that with the indigenous struggling to protect our homeland, and as I and perhaps some of you who also share this urgency to protect water and land, respond to the invitation of the Initianabi and Dakota people to join their fight, that love of place is what unites us. The conviction that this place is part of us, and we are part of it, made of the same dirt, so that in fighting for it, we are fighting for all of us, all of us who call Minnesota home, those long-settled and those more recently arrived. As for Abraham and these stories from Scripture, we cannot dismiss them, but just because they're in Scripture doesn't mean that what the protagonists do or say is always right and holy. These stories are in here because they are timeless.

This one, a story of migration, is a story still being told today. And Abraham is, after all, teaching me something here. With his racism towards the Canaanites, his sense of divine ownership of land, I know where that leads, both in the Bible and in the contemporary world: to violence against people in place. And so he's teaching me something about how I want to live in relationship to the land and its inhabitants that might be different from the way of some of my ancestors. Thanks be to God, and thanks be to perfect, very human Abraham and all my ancestors for the lessons they teach me and their mistakes as much as their successes. Amen.

Cheyenne Boon:

And now please stand as you are able and let us pray. Gracious God, help us to be grateful for what you have given us, to be humble in our acceptance of your gifts, and to recognize and respect that which is not ours. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And now together, let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying ...

Congregation:

`Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on, 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.

Cheyenne Boon:

And now let us sing the hymn Seek Not Afar for Beauty. Number 343, found in your crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

Cheyenne Boon:

As we go into this day, let us bless and keep one another. Let us make peace. Let us be at peace. May it be so, and may the church say amen.

Congregation:

Amen.