

Theresa Lungu:

Good morning and welcome to morning prayers. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book, psalm number 55, found on page 28. Please stand as you're able to read responsibly by whole verse.

Theresa Lungu:

Hear my prayer, oh God. Do not hide yourself from my petition.

Congregation:

Listen to me and answer me. I have no peace, because of my cares.

Theresa Lungu:

I am shaken by the noise of the enemy, and by the pressure of the wicked.

Congregation:

For they have cast an evil spell upon me, and are set against me in fury.

Theresa Lungu:

My heart quakes within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

Congregation:

Fear and trembling have come over me, and horror overwhelms me.

Theresa Lungu:

And I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove. I would fly away and be at rest."

Congregation:

For had it been an adversary who taunted me, then I could have borne it, or had it been enemies who vaunted themselves against me, then I could have hidden from them.

Theresa Lungu:

But it was you, someone after my own heart, my companion, my own familiar friend.

Congregation:

We took sweet counsel together, and walked with the throng in the house of God.

Theresa Lungu:

Cast your burden upon God who will sustain you.

Congregation:

God who will never let the righteous stumble.

Choir:

(singing)

Cheyenne Boon:

Good morning. Our reading for this morning is Counsel by Gregory Maguire.

But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart, a strategy of continence, avoidance, mule-headedness, and hope. The next assassin, brush fire, or virus swerves this way, head-on collision. We see it coming and can't divert, the path too crowded with pilgrims. By the side of the road to Calvary blooms a mustard bush. It never means to do anything but propagate. It sees the centuries winnow themselves in and out, and hears itself appropriated for a parable. It keeps all these things and ponders them in its heart, while casting savior seeds generation after generation.

I remember at the of the pandemic, in the job I had at the time, we would host these Zoom calls for people who were in our network doing the same kind of nonprofit work that we were doing. And these people were from across the country, and they knew each other, but not so well. And they were still having this sort of very similar and very stressful experience. And in these calls, we would have little check-ins where we would ask people how they were doing. I think even then, people had a sense that the truth wouldn't really fit into this quick icebreaker.

So at that time, in March of 2020, people would say, "Well, I'm at home, I'm doing okay. But the thing that is really bringing me joy is that the trees are blooming, or the plants are sprouting up outside my house. And even though everything else seems unknown, the trees, they have these little buds, and I'm watching them turn into leaves." And I remember feeling that way too. When I walk through my neighborhood, it just felt like something hopeful was still there for us. And we knew it would be there when we walked out our doors in March and in April and in May of 2020, as we sort of realized together how long this was going to go on.

And I was wondering whether I should really talk about COVID today, because we've been doing this for a long time now. And in many ways, we're back. And even more than that, we're in a really different season. This is the autumn of 2021. And instead of sitting at my window, looking out at the trees blooming, I see leaves falling every morning when I walk to church or to school.

But as I suspect many of us do, I still feel the weight of the pandemic in my life most days. And something else to know about me and autumn is that I'm from Southern California. During my first winter away at college in Oregon, I said to one of my professors, "You see that bush? That bush has no leaves on it. And to me, that bush is dead." And she just looked at me and she said, "Well, you let me know how that turns out for you." None of you will be surprised to learn that the bush I saw as dead did in fact bloom again in the spring. And it seems like we can expect that miracle to happen again and again in each of the plants now, shedding its leaves outside.

And when that happens, I for one will get to breathe a sigh of relief that the life I feared was gone was really just waiting. A truth this poem is pointing us toward is that there are things in this world that will persist. Mercifully, they will persist. They will always be there. They will return every year. They will

never really leave. And those persistent things probably have something to tell us about God. So as we all move to sort of hunker down for the winter, for the cold, for another anniversary of a long pandemic, waiting to see how things turn out in the spring, may we remember savior seeds and the ways that they grow for us and despite us, and our sometimes wavering hope, the ways that they grow for everyone and despite us all, and our sometimes wavering compassion.

Now please rise, in body or spirit, and let us pray. Gracious God, thank you for the things that save us, for the things that persist and demand to go on, regardless of our occasional heedlessness and our sometimes inability to see beyond our own time. Thank you for the daily miracles that reveal to us your eternal grace. Help us to notice all those seeds that you have planted for us, and all those seeds we could help along so that they might save someone else. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Theresa Lungu:

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 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.

Theresa Lungu:

Now we'll sing the hymn Lord of All Hopefulness, Lord of All Joy, number 81, found in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

Theresa Lungu:

As we go forth into this day, may we let go of our fears and anxieties, and let us rejoice in this day, believing that we have God's grace and his mercy with us. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.