

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 77, found on page 39. Please remain masked and stand as you are able, to read responsibly by the whole verse. I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me.

Congregation:

In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord, in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying, my soul refuses to be comforted.

Anna Burnham:

I think of God and I moan. I meditate and my spirit faints.

Congregation:

Thou dost hold my eyelids from closing, I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

Anna Burnham:

I consider the days of old. I remember the years long ago.

Congregation:

I commune with my heart in the night, I meditate and search my spirit.

Anna Burnham:

Will the Lord spurn forever and never again be favorable?

Congregation:

Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time?

Anna Burnham:

Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?

Congregation:

And I say, it is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed.

Anna Burnham:

I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord. Yay. I will remember thy wonders of old.

Congregation:

I will meditate on all thy work, and muse on thy mighty deeds.

Choir:

(singing)

Katherine O'Dair:

Good morning. The Swimming Lesson by Mary Oliver, "Feeling the icy kick, the endless waves reaching around my life, I moved my arms and coughed, and in the end saw land. Somebody, I suppose, remembering the medieval maxim had tossed me in, had wanted me to learn to swim, not knowing that none of us, whoever came back from that long, lonely fall and frenzied rising, ever learned anything at all about swimming, but only how to put off one by one dreams and pity and love and grace, how to survive in any place."

As I was sitting on a bench outside of my office this September, a student asked me what I learned during the pandemic. It caught me a bit by surprise, as I'm usually the one asking students the reflective questions. I paused for a moment. It seemed too big a question and one I was not prepared to answer in the moment.

We have all learned a lot and are still learning about what we have individually and collectively experienced over the past two years. Those who know me well know I love a good analogy. So please indulge me this morning as I use one to illustrate my learning. I am not a puzzle person, though I come from a puzzle family. I never understood the appeal, but in the spirit of trying something new, I decided to take on my first ever solo puzzle. Little did I know that the lessons I would learn in the weeks that it took me to do a 1000 piece puzzle would mirror some of the lessons I learned during the pandemic. And I will share a few of my learnings. The first lesson is to choose something you can commit to. So I chose a Frank Lloyd Wright design because I love everything mid-century modern.

I saw on the box what it would look like, and I could envision the end goal. I wasn't sure what was about to unfold, but I was eager to get started. Over 30 years ago, I committed to a profession of supporting college students. So as the gravity of the pandemic became apparent, I needed to commit and recommit nearly every day to what was important and why I chose this work.

The second lesson is to be persistent. A thousand piece puzzle was a huge task for me and I had to slowly and methodically take what was in front of me and fit the pieces together. The early days of the pandemic felt like a 5,000 piece puzzle with no photo on the box. Yet every day we fit a few more pieces together and slowly a picture began to emerge.

The third lesson was about perspective. I cannot tell you how many times I had to get up from the table, walk around the room and return to sit in a different chair. Without fail, I saw something I had not seen before. I changed my view and in doing so was able to make progress. Just stepping away gave me a different outlook. Over the past 18 months when times got hard, and they did, a walk outside, a conversation with a loved one, all helped me gain that needed perspective. I also learned how to manage my emotions, frustration, anger, joy. Who knew a puzzle could evoke such strong emotions. At one point, I remember being mad at the company because they clearly did not include all the pieces and even looked up the phone number to call, only to see the piece under my chair.

I was also frustrated that it felt like I was not making progress. It was not fast enough and it was there to greet me every day when I woke up. Just like the challenges we faced in navigating our work, the ability

to manage my own emotions and try to hold and care for the emotions of those around me during the most trying times was not easy, but I found strategies that worked. One of the greatest lessons that I learned is that I did not have to do this puzzle alone. My puzzle friends shared different strategies for figuring out how to approach the section with all the red pieces or basic puzzle 101 advice, like framing the edges first. I didn't actually know that. The same lesson proved true with my incredible group of colleagues during the pandemic. I needed their expertise, kindness and camaraderie more than I ever knew. I'm not sure I have ever worked with a group of people so dedicated to students. In the end, I did not become a puzzle person.

But the final lesson I will share is that, when you think you are done, you are not done. As I transferred my puzzle masterpiece off the table, several parts broke off and it is the perfect lesson, actually. Pieces will fall off and we will put them together again, bringing all of our learning to bear in whatever we choose to do.

Let us pray. Another morning, and I wake with thirsts for the goodness I do not have. I walk out to the pond and all the way God has given us such beautiful lessons. Oh Lord, I was never a quick scholar, but sulked and hunched over my books past the hour in the bell, grant me, in your mercy, a little more time. Love for the earth and love for you are having such a long conversation in my heart. Who knows what will finally happen or where I will be sent. Yet already, I have given a great many things away, expecting to be told to pack nothing except prayers which, with this thirst, I am slowly learning.

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 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. Together, let us sing the hymn, Now Thank We All Our God, number five, found in your Crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

Anna Burnham:

May the strength of God sustain us. May the power of God preserve us. May the hands of God protect us. May the way of God direct us. May the love of God go with us this day and every day. This service has ended. Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.