

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 Psalter Book, Psalm 34, found on page 17. Please remain masked and stand as you are able to read responsively by the whole verse. "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth."

Congregation:

My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.

Anna Burnham:

"Oh magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name forever together."

Congregation:

I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.

Anna Burnham:

"This poor soul cried and was heard by the Lord and was saved from every trouble."

Congregation:

O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him..

Anna Burnham:

"Come, oh children. Listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

Congregation:

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.

Anna Burnham:

"The face of the Lord is against evil doers to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth."

Congregation:

Many are afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all.

Anna Burnham:

"He keeps all their bones. Not one of them will be broken."

Congregation: The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Choir:
(singing)

Brenda Tindal:

In 1851, Sojourner Truth, a formally enslaved Black woman turned itinerate preacher and 19th century human rights advocate, mounted a podium at a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio. There she was said to have delivered an address now famously known as 'Ain't I a Woman?', an impassioned critique of American society at the intersections of race, class, and gender. And this is what she said. "That man over there said that a woman needs to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches and to have the best place everywhere you see nobody ever helped me into carriages or over mud puddles or gives me a best place. And ain't I a woman? Look at me. Look at my arm you see, eyes plowed and planted, and gathered into bonds. And you know what? No man could [inaudible 00:08:21] me and ain't I a woman?

"I've born 13 children and seen most all born into slavery. But when I cried out a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me. And ain't I a woman? That man in black there said that a woman can't have as much rights as a man because Christ wasn't a woman. Well, where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with it. If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, together women ought to be able to turn it right side up again." And then she stepped away from the lectern. I first encountered this text when my high school debate coach encouraged me to examine and adapt Truth's speech as part of my repertoire of prose and interpretive material for speech and debate competition. In fact, one of the first places I performed 'Ain't I a Woman' was in 1996-1997 at Harvard's Early Bird Speech and Debate Tournament, so today marks a full circle.

For me, Truth's speech became more than performance collateral for debate circuits. It single-handedly transformed the ways in which I view the world and my place within it. It was the first time a woman truly entered my intellectual and cultural imagination as not merely a marginal subject but as a historic actor and a purveyor of the unvarnished truth. I was mesmerized by her refrain, 'Ain't I a Woman?'. This seemingly informal and unpretentious question registered as both a profound conundrum and a clarion call. In the years that followed this introduction to Sojourner Truth and her brave observations of the world she inhabited, I immersed myself in the study of U.S. history and culture searching for the people, places, and ideas that transformed public life and informed social and political discourses. In doing so, a curious trend emerged, and that is what I learned.

If you want to put your thumb on the pulse of a generation's greatest moral and ethical conflicts, you must look for the questions they ask themselves in the society writ large. For instance, in the 1960s, against the backdrop of racial animus, a splintered Black freedom movement, and growing unrest in urban centers throughout the country, Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King asked, "Where do we go from here? Community or chaos?" There are many other examples of probing questions offered by our nation's poignant thinkers. But my point here is that Dr. King and Sojourner Truth and many others seem

to understand the power and virtues of courageous inquiry, a willingness to ask hard questions when there are no easy answers, a sense of bravery that is unafraid of reckonings if it leads to our collective awakening.

In essence, courageous inquiry is a dogged commitment to truth, reconciliation, examining the world beyond our own echo chambers, and charting a more just, equitable, and beloved course forward. We need courageous inquiry now more than ever. So today I pray and plea that as we continue to build upon this beacon of academic rigor and excellence that we also strive to exercise the courage of our ideals and questions, that we remain curious, engaged with and in the service of the larger ecosystem to which we all belong, and that we leverage courageous inquiry and creative solutions to make the world better than how we found it. Thank you.

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. By 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, Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates 101 found in your Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

Anna Burnham:

May the Lord bless and keep you, may God's spirit shine upon you, may the peace of Christ wrap your heart, and may the word Christ dwell richly within you. And together, let us say amen.

Congregation:

Amen.