

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Blessed is he that considereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in the time of trouble.

Congregation:

The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth and thou will not deliver him until the will of his enemies.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

All that hate me whisper together against me. Against me do they devise my hurt.

Congregation:

An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him: and now that he lieth, he shall rise up no more.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.

Congregation:

But thou, O Lord, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

By this I know that thou favors me, because mine enemy does not triumph over me.

Congregation:

And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face forever.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen. You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing)

Jeffrey Hamburger:

Good morning. I think we can all agree that the year that's just gone by wasn't the best. With the new year that's just started, I'd like to say with Shelly, if this be winter, then spring can't be far behind. And while the leaves will eventually poke out, and the flowers bloom, right now, I'll confess, the world seems rather bleak. I read the columns in the paper and online about how to stay resilient, to pass time during the pandemic, to stay in touch with friends, to focus on those things that matter most. All well meant advice. But after two years, I'd be the first to admit that I feel my resourcefulness has at best become attenuated.

I don't know if any of you have lost loved ones, close friends, or even acquaintances, over the past couple of years. I have. And I'm not even speaking of COVID. Although, a few people I know have indeed

succumbed to our common plague. An older cousin of mine was unable to visit his wife on her death bed. Four years ago, I lost my wife to cancer after a struggle that lasted over 20 years. Listening to the music here this morning, which she would've enjoyed so much, makes me think of her.

Just last month, the close friend, the matriarch of a huge clan, the soul of friendship, a woman who was larger than life and who acted as unofficial great godmother to my children, passed away. She was 90, so it was to be expected. But still, there is never a good time. The world's seems smaller without her, and lonelier too. And now my father-in-law, also 90, is dying. Just last week, I heard from an old high school friend with whom I regret to say, I'd been out of touch, that his wife has been diagnosed with advanced breast cancer, the same insidious disease to which my wife succumbed, and still more heartbreaking, that he had lost his eldest son to cancer.

Two of my very closest colleagues also passed away these past few years, one in Berlin, the other in London. I wrote obituaries for both of them. The first, Robert, I'd known for 40 years. We published together, pursued projects together, traveled together, also with Harvard students on wonderful excursions, all over Europe to visit medieval monuments. Those trips were some of the most memorable moments in my life. Robert succumbed to Parkinson's, which he battled bravely to the last, never slowing down unless he had to. I recall him charging ahead of a column of students, the cane in each of his hands. The students begged to stop for coffee, but not Robert. There was more to say, more to see.

The same with my colleague, Paul, in London. In addition to being one of the greatest scholars of Gothic architecture, he was also one of the funniest and most charming men I'd ever met. I can remember my then 15 year old daughter, coming into the kitchen one evening when he was over for dinner, after a lecture, and simply saying, "Can we keep him?" That's how everyone felt about Paul. Paul died after sudden onset dementia. In a very English way, he'd always been charmingly absent minded, but nothing prepared us for the speed with which he disintegrated. It was positively frightening.

I sometimes tell myself, this is what happens when you hit 65, as I will this week. I have a twin brother. So between us, we've accumulated 130 years. He only got married for the first time, seven years ago, and he already has three young children, the youngest just a month old. All I can say is, better him than me. Just the thought, cheers me up.

This is not a homily on living in the shadow of death. Rather, I'd like it to be a reminder of the value of friendship. No matter how much I miss them, I am fortunate to have had such sterling friends. Some of whom were collaborators with whom I could do what I love most in the world, which is teaching and scholarship. Years ago, I gave another of these little talks, and spoke about the importance of finding a vocation, not just a job. That's what I wish for those of you, more likely in the choir behind me than in front of me. No matter what you end up doing work, one enjoys and finds fulfilling is one of life's greatest consolations, as long as it doesn't become an escape. And if you share that sense of calling with others, you too will forge lifelong friendships.

I appreciate this opportunity to acknowledge these friendships out loud in a public setting, as in each case, due to COVID, I was unable to attend the funeral to bear witness in the company of others, to the friends I loved and admired. It doesn't matter that none of you knew them. Speaking their names here,

Joanna, Robert, Paul, provides some sense of closure. It hasn't been my intent to be lugubrious. To the contrary, as much as anything else, friendship is what makes life worth living. In the words of Cicero, who wrote at length on friendship, "Friendship improves happiness and abates misery, by the doubling of our joy and the dividing of our grief." In that spirit, I often remind myself of my definition of Jewish optimism. Things could be worse. Indeed, they could be. So with that, I'll look forward to whatever this day brings. And so too, I hope, will you.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Thank you, Dr. Professor. At this time, please rise with me as we recite the Lord's prayer. Together.

Congregation:

Our Father, which 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. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespassed against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Now let us sing together, hymn number 307, found in your Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

As we leave this place, but never away from God's presence, may you have friends who give you joy and divide your grief, and help you to know that you're not alone on life's journey. Amen.