

Theresa Lungu:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Theresa Lungu:

And welcome to morning prayers. Please be reminded that we do not have morning prayers all of next week because of spring break, so from Monday the 14th to Friday the 18th of March, we are not going to have morning prayers.

Theresa Lungu:

Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book, Psalm number 46 found on page 23. Please stand as you are able and read responsively by whole verse.

Theresa Lungu:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Congregation:

Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

Theresa Lungu:

Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.

Congregation:

There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most high.

Theresa Lungu:

God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved. God shall help her, and that right early.

Congregation:

The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved. He uttered his voice, the earth melted.

Theresa Lungu:

The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Congregation:

Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations He hath made in the earth.

Theresa Lungu:

He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth, he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder, he burneth the chariot in the fire.

Congregation:

Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

Theresa Lungu:

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Choir:

(Singing)

Joan Najita:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Joan Najita:

That was really beautiful.

In her book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Kimmerman describes the nature of gifts and our relationship with nature. "Paying attention," she says, "Is a form of reciprocity with the living world, receiving gifts with open eyes and open heart. A gift comes to you through no action of your own, free, having moved toward you without your beckoning. It's not a reward. You cannot earn it or call it to you or even deserve it, and yet it appears. Your only role is to be open-eyed and present. Gifts exist in the realm of humility and mystery, as with random acts of kindness, we do not know their source."

I am by no means as highly attuned to nature as Robin Kimmerman describes but I do agree that sometimes you can hear the universe speaking. You probably have your own examples, but in my own case, one time it happened when I was standing on the southern flanks of Mauna Loa, the giant shield volcano on the big island of Hawaii. The moon was down and in the great shadow of Mauna Loa it was very dark except for the brilliance of the night sky. The stars and dusty clouds are the Milky Way pressed and close. They seemed so near and strained to hear their message. I thought of all the stars in the sky. Some born here in the Milky Way, others having migrated from afar, in small galaxies that fell into ours and dispersed their stars. So similar to the story of my own grandparents and their path to Hawaii. One, a teenage future sugar cane laborer, another a picture bride who seized the moment and took a chance. Another, an illegal immigrant, determined to make it to Hawaii. With what dreams did they once view the dark skies of rural Japan? What messages did the stars have for them?

All across the sky the stars sparkled. Billions of stars in the Milky Way, each a fiery flame, home to planets of their own, some habitable leg earth. A community of world stretched out across the galaxy. Do their inhabitants also look up at the sky and contemplate their view of the Milky Way? What messages do the stars have for them?

Just like that the moment was gone. My focus flickered and ambient thoughts returned. Rough lava crunching under our feet as we ambled back to the car and earthbound thoughts returned.

As an astronomer people often ask whether we finally found another planet we can move to escape the mess we've created here. The idea of migration, once just across the seas and continents of earth, now stretched out across interstellar space, the search for a new start and the inspiration for so many movies, novels, and comic books.

My answer is a simple one. No, we haven't yet identified another planet like Earth, although we do get closer every day, but I can safely predict that when we do, it will still be a long, long, long while before we can actually travel there. In other words, our Earth is probably not unique in the universe as a habitable planet, but it is unique because it's the one we have. With the stars unreachable, Earth remains are one and only home.

Indeed, one of the most remarkable images taken from space when humans first left the planet, is a glance backward at earth, which appears as a bright blue marble, a gift, free, unearned, but ours nevertheless. Why were we given this gift? The answer, if there is one, lies in the realm of humility and mystery, that Kimmerman describes. The gift of a habitable planet, resource rich and nurturing, is simply astounding. We are asked to receive it with open eyes and open heart, alert to our responsibility to love and protect it. Thank you.

Theresa Lungu:

Please stand as you are able and let us pray.

Theresa Lungu:

Lord, we give you thanks for the gift of a new day. Grant, we pray, that we pass the hours of this day in the perfect freedom of your service, amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Theresa Lungu/Congregation:

And together, let us recite the Lord's prayer saying, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is 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, for and ever, amen.

Theresa Lungu:

Please let sing the hymn "The Spacious Firmament on High," number 187 in the crimson Harvard Hymnals.

Congregation:

(singing).

Theresa Lungu:

Thank you for joining us this morning and as we go forth unto this day, may the beginning of a new day renew our hearts with God's strength and purpose, may our errors of yesterday be forgiven, and let us walk closer in God's ways today. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.