

Cheyenne Boon:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Cheyenne Boon:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book. Please rise in body or spirit, to read Psalm number 121, found on page 61.

Cheyenne Boon:

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

Congregation:

My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.

Cheyenne Boon:

He will not suffer thy foot to be moved. He that keepeth thee will not slumber.

Congregation:

Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

Cheyenne Boon:

The Lord is thy keeper. The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.

Congregation:

The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

Cheyenne Boon:

The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil. He shall preserve thy soul.

Congregation:

The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth and even forever more.

Choir:

(singing)

Jasper Schoff:

Morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Jasper Schoff:

The lesson today is short. A quote from the author, Richard Powers. "The use of music is to remind us how short a time we have a body."

Not so long ago in our history, music not only engaged the soul as most of us still believe it to today, but pierced the skin itself, directed itself at the raw building blocks of our physical being. The right combination of horse hair on gut, with hammer-on string, columns of air, collectively forced through the vocal chords of an assembled crowd, and given shape by so many by so many mouths, could make grown men grow agitated leap to their feet and draw their swords, could even stop the heart.

Renaissance listeners like to model themselves off the ancient figure of Alexander the Great. Who famously, upon hearing a song played by his servant, Timotheus, in the Phrygian mode, became violent, and was unable to be calmed, nor his weapons prized from his grip, until Timotheus performs yet another song in the more docile Hyperphrygian mode.

Centuries later, in Bach's cantata, *Mein Herze schwimmt im Blut*, or my heart swims in blood, the agonizing, carefully chosen dissonances, and flowing melismas, were meant to stir the listener to moral epiphany, by quite literally, placing their bodies in the original state of sinner's guilt. Drowning the heart and fluid before relieving the pressure with an inevitable and a longed for consonance.

Much of the music we sing for you here, was intended to be felt, as much as it was to be heard. In the age of Spotify, however, of AirPods, and the cool decorum of silent concert halls, music has become something most of us understand, purely with our ears, trapped in some higher, more abstract plane of experience.

Perhaps, in a sense, I'm lucky. There's nothing like forcing yourself to eke out a high G at 8:00 AM, to really make you acutely aware of the limitations of your own body. I'm quite sure that for the last three years I've been making all of you acutely aware of the limitations of my own body, as well. And so, I'm sorry about that. Yeah.

Singing, especially in the morning, is not just an intellectual exercise. It's an athletic event. Anyone who has ever tried to sing a sustained high note before breakfast, knows that it's just as good as sprinting a hundred meters, for getting the blood pumping and the heart rate going. Even later in the day, though, singing does force you to come to terms with the essential fact of your embodiment. With your being in the world, as a person, with lungs, throat, ears, and heart.

Maybe it's because of how music can negotiate, so naturally, the continuum between body and soul, that singing is such a powerful act of devotion. Those who sing, pray twice. Something I heard in an address during my freshman year, that has stuck with me ever since. There's something about the act of physically vocalizing texts, the way we do with the communal prayers that we say here every day. That traverses the territory linking spirit and body, in such a way as to really give the words a different meaning.

Matthew Parker, the Archbishop of Canterbury, between 1559 and 1575, taught that, to read properly, one really had to read aloud. Sacred verses were to be thought over in the mouth, wherein, the voice could open them spiritually. Making them available for intellectual digestion, in quite a different manner. To sing a psalm, for Parker, was to engage with your faith, in a more profound way than silence and contemplative reading.

I'm sorry to say that I, myself, am not religious. I'm sorry, grandad, if you end up listening to this. But I do you believe, that this kind of faith has a place in secular life, as much as it does in religious. Faith, in the connection between self and the world. Faith, in what our voice teacher, Frank, would call, the eternal present. Faith in your place in that eternal present. Faith in the essential nobility of beauty. Music making and singing, above all, is deeply rooted in these truths. Ancient truths, I think, of which my years as a chorister and a fellow have convinced me.

A little more than two years ago, on the morning of March 12th, 2020, Alex, who is my fellow second tenure, you can see him in the rows there, and roommate, and myself, dragged our ourselves out of bed around six in the morning. And we jogged in the almost shell shocked silence of unwilling wakefulness down to the Charles, where we met an assortment of other brave fellows and choristers, next to Weeks bridge.

On one of the last mornings, before we were sent away, we sang together in the early morning chill. And it only struck me afterwards, that we had closed with Josef Rheinberger's, Abendlied, a song for the evening, just as the sun was coming up over the river. Which I think, is a sublime and poignant circularity.

Singing is as tied to time, as it is to the body. Singing written music, in particular, is a temporal recreation, requiring coordination on a scale, I think, unheard of in any other field. At the same time, as it grounds you in your own body, it transcends it in quite a magical way. An echo reverberating through the years. Performance connects in you to centuries of timeless rituals, devotion, faith, and beauty.

May you all today, use your voices to reflect that beauty, wherever you can. And to celebrate your own unique belonging to the world, in bodily form, for however short or long a time.

Please stand, as you are able, for the Lord's prayer.

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.

Cheyenne Boon:

Now we'll sing the hymn, Seek Not Afar for Beauty. Number 343 in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Choir/Congregation:

(singing)

Cheyenne Boon:

As we go into this day, let us bless and keep one another. Let us make peace. Let us be at peace. May it be so, and may the church say, amen.

Congregation:

Amen.