

Laurie Sedgwick:

Good morning. And welcome to Morning Prayers. Please stand as you are able for our responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter. This morning, we'll be reading Psalm 149, found on page 75.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful.

Congregation:

Let Israel be glad in its Maker. Let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and liars.

Congregation:

For the Lord takes pleasure in his people. He adorns the humble with victory.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Let the faithful exalt in glory. Let them sing for joy on their couches.

Congregation:

Let the high praises of God be in their throats, and two-edged swords in their hands.

Laurie Sedgwick:

To execute vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples.

Congregation:

To bind their kings with fetters, and their nobles with chains of iron.

Laurie Sedgwick:

To execute on them the judgment decreed. This glory for all his faithful ones. Praise the Lord.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Let us now sing the Hymn 36 found in your Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Choir:

(singing)

Julia Paolillo:

The inspired text this morning is a selection from Alain de Botton's book, *The Architecture of Happiness*. "It is in dialogue with pain, that many beautiful things acquire their value. Acquaintance with grief turns out to be one of the more unusual prerequisites of architectural appreciation. We might, quite aside from all other requirements, need to be a little sad before buildings can properly touch us. Our sadness won't be of the searing kind, but more like a blend of joy and melancholy. Joy at the perfection we see

before us. Melancholy at an awareness of how seldom we are sufficiently blessed to encounter anything of its kind."

I love when newcomers attend Morning Prayers. And not I'm any sort of evangelist, but because when they find a seat and settle in, I love to watch their faces as their eyes wander upwards, taking in for the first time, the beauty of this space.

As a Choral Fellow in the University Choir, I spend a lot of time in this building. From my daily Morning Prayer seat in the front row, over there, usually nestled between Rena and Olympia, I have watch the brilliant sun shine through the notably unstained glass behind me, tracing its path across the carved organ screen opposite me as it rises and hits that Veritas crest just so.

In the dark winter months, the light doesn't make it to the crest during Morning Prayers. And then, as spring approaches, the sun returns bright and early to blind us as we process into the chapel.

On Sunday mornings, I shuffle up to the choir loft at 9:45, coffee and Psalter in hand, to prepare for the weekly service. From my perch way up there with Enrique on my right and Jonathan on my left, the capitals of these great columns that hold up the building are at eye level, and I can examine the carved pelican piercing her breast to feed her young, a beautiful reminder of sacrifice.

During the sermon, my attention will sometimes wander. Sorry, to whoever's preaching, to the wall engraved with the names of the war dead, another reminder of sacrifice. I study the names of the four men who graduated from the School of Education, and I marvel at how different their lives looked from mine, connected as we are by this place.

For much of the fall, these observations, these opportunities to study this place, were a lovely, if unremarkable, benefit of singing with the choir. Then one frigid December morning, I dragged my feet along the 20-minute walk from my apartment to Mem Church, for 8:00 AM fellows' rehearsal. The only thing novel about this quotidian routine on this particular day was that I was newly heartbroken, and I spent much of the walk wondering if I would manage to make it through that day without crying. I didn't. But that morning, once I made it to the church, once I was enveloped by the fellowship of the fellows and the warmth of our notoriously overheated choir room, I began to appreciate this physical space, and the people who fill it, in new ways.

My experience echoed de Botton's observation that it is, perhaps, when our lives are at their most problematic, that we are likely to be most receptive to beautiful things. All of a sudden, these small daily rituals in Memorial Church took on out-sized importance and became the most meaningful part of my life at Harvard. Six days a week for many weeks now, I make these small journeys between spaces in this building, each one a sort of home.

If I must make a lesson out of this, let it be this. Find the little rituals in your life that provide you with moments of joy and respite. The thing about being a grad student, and a grad student in a one year

program no less, is that you understand from your first day on campus, that this experience will be fleeting.

My first fall semester is also my last fall semester. My first holy week will be my last. You understand what the world of work is like. And so, you can appreciate being a student again, working on your own schedule, enjoying late nights and slow mornings, unless of course you are a Choral Fellow. Each morning, I zip into my robe, process into the chapel, and take my seat at Prayers, with de Botton's blend of joy and melancholy. Joy at the perfection I see before me in this space, and in the people who fill it. And melancholy at an awareness of how seldom I am sufficiently blessed to encounter anything of its kind.

Fill your lives with people and places that leave you in awe, and just a little bit sad at the thought of their loss.

I invite you to join me in prayer.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. And where there is sadness, joy. This in your name, we pray. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.