

Anna Burnham:

Good morning.

Church Congregation:

Morning.

Anna Burnham:

Happy Easter, and welcome to Morning Prayers at Memorial Church. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book, Psalm 89, found on page 45. It's in your pews. Please stand as you are able, to read responsively by the whole verse.

Anna Burnham:

I will sing in your steadfast love, oh, Lord, forever. With my mouth, I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

Church Congregation:

I declare that your steadfast love is established forever. Your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

Anna Burnham:

You said, I have made a covenant with my chosen one. I have sworn to my servant David:

Church Congregation:

I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.

Anna Burnham:

Happy are the people who know the festal shout. Who walk, oh Lord, in the light of your countenance.

Church Congregation:

They exalt in your name all day long, and extol in your righteousness.

Anna Burnham:

For you are the glory of their strength. By your favor, our horn is exalted.

Church Congregation:

For our shield belongs to the Lord. Our King is the holy one of Israel.

Choir:

(Singing).

Merlin Butler:

Good morning.

Church Congregation:

Morning.

Merlin Butler:

The reading that I've chosen for this morning is an excerpt from the old English poem, The Dream of the Rood, as translated by R.M. Liuzza.

And yet, lying there a long while, I beheld in sorrow the Savior's tree until I heard it utter a sound. That the best of woods began to speak words. It was so long ago. I remember it still. That I was felled from the forest's edge, ripped up for my roots. Strong enemies seized me there, made me their spectacle, made me beat their criminals. They bore me on their shoulders and then set me on the hill. Enemies enough, fixed me fast. Then I saw the Lord of mankind hasten eagerly when he wanted to ascend onto me. There, I dared not bow down or break against the Lord's word, when I saw the ends of the earth tremble. Easily, I might have felled all those enemies, and yet I stood fast. Then the young hero made ready. That was God almighty. Strong and resolute. He ascended on the high gallows, brave in the sight of many when he wanted to ransom mankind.

I trembled when he embraced me, but I dared not bow to the ground or fall to the Earth's corners. I had to stand fast. I was reared as a cross. I raised up the mighty king, the Lord of Heaven. I dared not lie down. They drove dark nails through me. The scars are still visible. Open wounds of hate. I dared not harm any of them. They mocked us both together. I was drenched all with blood flowing from that man's able side after he had sent forth his spirit.

While I'm accidentally returning us all to Good Friday, happy Easter, perspective has been the buzzword lingering in the back of my mind since before I even entered the college. August of 2018, before I had officially entered any military spaces on my own terms, but rather on my dad's, I sat at a bar for the first time and asked veterans if they had any advice for a wee 18-year-old entering college, and hopefully, the army.

The Marine I spoke to had this. If you remember nothing else from tonight, remember the word perspective. Lo and behold, four years later, it's the only thing I remember. The dream of the rood follows the perspective of first, an unnamed dreamer, and then the cross itself on which Christ was crucified. In college, and in any setting, we learned through listening to a variety of perspectives. And weeks ago, when I was first thinking about what sort of talk I could possibly give on Easter Monday, the cherished member of my community, and a good friend, reminded me that I perhaps had an interesting perspective to offer.

If you've had more than two conversations with me over the past two years, you know I was involved in army ROTC. Note the past tense, was. When I received my scholarship as a senior in high school, I was excited and honored by the opportunity. I believed what my dad had told me of the army, that green meant green, and you were a soldier first before anything else. Despite the trans-ban coming from Trump in April of 2018, I believed that if I was a soldier first, I could stay in the closet for eight more years. After four years of Catholic school, what was eight more in uniform? What was being called ma'am over sir, if the return was the camaraderie I so desperately craved. And when the university shut down March of 2020, I had already spent two years chasing the divine through literature. Two years,

feeling split at various points between my understanding of myself as a Catholic, as a cadet, and as a queer cabochon.

And during the pandemic, I fought with those senses of self, and now I'm here. Despite all accounts, having officially left the army four weeks ago. Which should not be possible. As a scholarship cadet, I signed a contract when I was 18 saying that I would serve after graduation. I planned my entire college career accordingly. I was determined that I would graduate and commission as an officer, and when the world shut down and I was living at home face to face with myself in the mirror, I looked and went, can I actually live this way for the next 10 years?

And the answer over time became a glaring no. And as time progressed, as I had to eventually let the army know of this, I had to fight for myself despite doubt in my own identity, despite doubt that was I really queer enough, despite doubt that I don't know in a future I held so strongly to, despite doubt that I couldn't see anything coming next, if I left. And after struggles with mental health, and depression, and ADHD, the army said, okay, bye. And I said, thanks.

And I have no idea what comes next. And that is a good thing, I have learned. So, I would like to offer a small prayer. Dear God, thank you for the courage that brought us all here today. The courage of people who helped us stand in this space. Thank you for giving us ears and tongue so that we might listen to other perspectives, and hopefully take lessons with us. Take bits of people onward into the future to change us for the better. I don't know if we can claim that anyone's life has a strong moral, but maybe we can listen, bring the best with us anyway. Amen.

Church Congregation:

Amen.

Anna Burnham:

Please stand as you are able, and together, let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught us saying...

Church 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. Forgive 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.

Anna Burnham:

Together. Let us sing the hymn Christ the Lord is Risen Again. Number 165 found in your crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing).

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Anna Burnham:

May we enter this week with the joy of Easter fresh in our hearts, firmly rooted in the promise of spring, of renewal, and of new life. Amen.

Church Congregation:

Amen.