

Theresa Lungu:

(Music).

Theresa Lungu:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Theresa Lungu:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter Book, Psalm Number 104, found on page 52. Please stand as you're able to read responsively by whole verse.

Theresa Lungu:

Bless the Lord, oh my soul. Oh Lord, my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty.

Congregation:

Wrapped with light like a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent.

Theresa Lungu:

You set the beams of your chambers on the waters. You make the clouds your chariots. You ride on the wings of the wind.

Congregation:

You make the waves your messengers, fire and flame your ministers.

Theresa Lungu:

You set the earth on its foundations so that it shall never be shaken.

Congregation:

You cover it with the deep as with a garment. The waters stood above the mountains.

Theresa Lungu:

At your rebuke, they flee. At the sound of your thunder, they take to flight.

Congregation:

Then rose up the mountains, ran down to the valleys, to a place that you appointed for them.

Theresa Lungu:

May the glory of the Lord endure forever. May the Lord rejoice in his works.

Congregation:

Who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke.

Choir:

(Singing)

Jimmy Young:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Jimmy Young:

Today's inspired text comes from the ancient playwright, Aeschylus. It reads, "He who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep, pain that cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart. And in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God."

I stand before you all today, not only as a senior from Dunster House, but as nothing more than a kid from a small town in Northern Michigan, as the product of a loving family and community, and as a human who has felt the gravity of moments that only reflections on life's hardships and painful mistakes can afford.

Tasked with reflecting on my time here at the college, I have spent the past few weeks digging deep into the formative experiences that have shaped my story, in hopes of imparting some wisdom to you all. While I do not believe, as the text suggests, that suffering is a prerequisite to learning, I have found that reflecting on times of pain has provided me with the most wisdom. The most poignant example, being a diagnosis my father received shortly before I began my time here at Harvard.

At the young age of 54, he was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease. And while I'm eternally grateful that the disease's progression has defied doctor's expectations, I'd be lying to you all to say that observing from over a thousand miles away has been easy. Painfully marked by indications of the progression, I've spent many nights in sorrow, as pain felt as if it were literally falling drop by drop upon my heart.

However, as both Aeschylus and God's Word reminds us, even in our own despair, against our will, wisdom comes to us by the grace of God. It is that wisdom afforded by God's grace that I hope to share with you all today through a lesson of my father's unconditional love.

I was once told that my dad has a bigger heart than the hundred acres of field and forest our home and farm animals reside on. And while his condition has caused some things to slip away, he certainly has not forgotten how to love and how to love deeply. For me, his love has been felt from the start, in times of celebration and more notably, in times of trial, after losing a hard-fought football game, or in my

worst mistakes. I know my dad loves me, not because of my achievements, but simply because I am his son.

For others, my father's love has been felt in his profession. As a third-generation funeral home director, my father has spent countless moments with family members and friends who are grieving the loss of a loved one. In their most vulnerable moments, his profession has provided him with opportunities to share his love with those who need it most, regardless of where they come from or what are, what state despair they might be in.

The best example of the love he shared came when a man had died in our town who had no family or friends to attend or afford his funeral. My father and grandfather who ran the funeral home at the time could have simply had the man cremated and his remains disposed of. However, they felt that this man with no family or friends to be found deserved a proper funeral and ceremony of his life. There were three men that attended his funeral that day, my father, my grandfather, and a pastor they brought in to conduct the service. Despite the lack of funding, family, and friends, they met the man where he was with an unconditional love and respect that they felt he deserved in his passing.

Beyond his profession, my father has found ways to share his love with those he does not even know, whether it be providing snow removal for a stranger who lives down the street or helping an elderly couple into their car after a trip to the grocery store. My father's love has been felt by many hundreds throughout our small town.

But beyond his stories and examples, how does one begin to define unconditional love? How might we understand this kind of love so that we can share it with our families, our friends, and those in our communities here at Harvard and beyond? In short, unconditional love is loving in spite of one's flaws, mistakes, and shortcomings. It is a love that doesn't care about one's culture, credentials, or creed. Unconditional love is recognizing the fragility of life and making a conscious commitment to improving the lives of others through acts of kindness and compassion, not because of what they might do in return, but because they live and breathe and walk the same beautiful planet we do. Finally, unconditional love is knowing that even when my father's condition enters its final stages, and even when I may no longer be remembered, he will still love me, not because of who I am or what I've become, but simply because I'll be there right by his side.

I provide these stories and examples in hopes that they inspire you as much as they have inspired me to love yourselves, your colleagues, your classmates, your neighbors, and even your enemies, with an unconditional love so strong that no hardship or disagreement may stand in this way. The love I speak of is not intrinsic to our nature, and in many ways, resists some of our deepest primitive instincts. It is, however, a love that can be felt, and a love that must be learned in both triumph and defeat, in times of happiness and hopelessness. If this kind of love can transcend even the most unforgiving neurological diseases, it can undoubtedly transcend the relentless challenges brought upon by the political, demographic, and ideological disagreements we see in our communities and our country today. The lesson here is simple. Have faith in yourself to produce that love. Have faith in others to provide that love. And have faith in the power of unconditional love as a means of mending our broken world.

I'll summarize now with a few lines from a poem I wrote earlier this year about my father. It reads, "You taught me to love with unconditional grace, always extending. You taught me humility. Your lessons were never ending. You taught me to love the earth and the wildlife all around, lessons of kindness and compassion throughout our small town. Yet the lesson learned now is much different and much longer. It's harder for me to hold up, but I know I will become stronger. I pray for peace to be found inside. And for memories of you to be kept alive. I pray for acceptance, for that I yearn, to know that someday, somewhere, your former self will return. As your memories fade it brings us much pain. Your impact, your legacy, however, they still remain. Evidence of your life, abounds all around. In family and friends and even strangers it can be found. Some things still lost from this terrible disease, but being reminded of your traits in me keeps me at ease. I now walk in your old boots as a daily reminder to love the ones you hold close, and to always be a bit kinder.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, grant us wisdom in times of sorrow, give us strength in our darkest days, and let us be a beacon of your unconditional love to all of those around us. Into your hands we commend our bodies, our minds, our souls, and our spirits. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Theresa Lungu:

Please stand as you're able, 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 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.

Theresa Lungu:

Please let us sing the hymn, Jesus Lives. [Thy Terrors Now 00:20:04]. Number 175. Found in the crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing).

Theresa Lungu:

As we go forth into this day, let us rejoice in the privilege of being able to share in this time together, time to reflect and to breathe in the wonder of God's love. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Congregation:

(Music)

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