

Laurie Sedgwick:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Laurie Sedgwick:

And welcome to our final Morning Prayers service of the academic year.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Please join us after service for coffee down in the Buttrick Room. We hope you'll join us. And please stand as you are able for our responsive reading from the Black Appleton Psalter Book.

Laurie Sedgwick:

This morning, we'll be reading Psalm 20, found on page 10.

Laurie Sedgwick:

May the Most High answer you in the day of trouble. The name of the God of Jacob defend you.

Congregation:

Send you help from the holy place, and strengthen you of Zion.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Remember all your offerings and accept your burnt sacrifice.

Congregation:

Grant you your heart's desire, and prosper all your plans.

Laurie Sedgwick:

We will shout for joy at your victory and triumph in the name of our God. May the Most High grant all your requests.

Congregation:

Now I know that God gives victory to the anointed one. Out of the holy Heaven, God will answer with a strong and victorious right hand.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Some put their trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will call upon the name of our God.

Congregation:

They collapse and fall down, but we will arise and stand upright.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Oh God, give victory to our sovereign, and answer us when we call.

Choir:

(Singing)

Rena Cohen:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Rena Cohen:

By no means is this a sacred text. It's probably not even a very inspired one. But if you will indulge me, I would like to begin by reading an excerpt from the college application essay about choral singing that I submitted to Harvard four years ago. College confidential, watch out. These are trade secrets.

Gazing at the audience from the cramped risers, I could not distinguish my individual voice within the rich expressive sound around me. But this lack of stardom wasn't disappointing. Rather, I marveled at how the varying ranges and timbres of hundreds of voices blended together, moving and mingling in synchronization. This feeling of belonging, of contributing to something bigger than myself, left me spell bound.

When I wrote these words, I was a high school senior finishing up an intensive Fall semester in my public school's IB program. For four long years, I'd been asked over and over how I'd scored on the math test, what my GPA was, and where exactly I was planning to apply to college. My classmates seem to want to define my social role solely through my academic achievements. And, while it's nice to be thought of as a good student, it's not so nice when it seems to be the only thing that people see or appreciate about you.

Yearning to escape this sense of academic hyper visibility, I spent much of high school staying very quiet in classrooms and social spaces, trying not to draw any more attention to myself than my grades and test scores already did.

Zero Period Choir was the one place at school where I felt free from unwanted comparisons and scrutiny. There were no hierarchies or top marks. After all, as I wrote about in my essay, the whole point was to blend in with everybody else. Choir didn't distort or distill my identity into my academic achievements. The only identity I had was as a soprano, one of many in our disproportionately large section.

I wouldn't quite have been able to pinpoint this at this time, but I've realized since that, what I loved about high school choir was, for 50 minutes every morning I got to be invisible. In fact, I like that feeling of invisibility and blending in so much that when I received my Harvard acceptance, the very first thing that I did was Google choirs to join. Wary of spaces where I would be defined in comparison to others, I feared the rumors that I had heard about Harvard's competitive student culture, weed out classes graded on a curve, clubs you had to compete to get into, consulting jobs people began recruiting for their sophomore years. I needed to feel anonymous, invisible, an indistinguishable part of a whole. I needed a choir.

Well, lucky for me. When I joined U Choir, I found many of those same things that I had loved about high school choir. We were a large group with a shared goal of blend and a non-hierarchical structure under our benevolent dictator, Ed. But when I look back on my four years in this group, the predominant sensation has not been the comforting invisibility of blending in with a crowd, quite the opposite. More than anything else I have felt seen.

I felt seen when at my very first U Choir rehearsal ever, U Choir legend, Benji, turned to me with his signature beaming smile and told me that I was doing a good job. I felt seen when at the end of my first year in the choir, the senior choir secretary at the time, Theodora, invited the other freshmen and I on a special picnic to the Harvard Arboretum, just to get to know us better. I felt seen every time we passed the peace with a hug in Sunday service, or somebody thanked me for my baking during tea time, or I made knowing eye contact with my irreplaceable co-secretary Sophie across the pews during an especially spicy Morning Prayers Psalm.

This feeling which I'll call loving visibility emanates to and from each of us as we sing together, eat together, laugh during a rehearsal, or cry after a stressful week. In U Choir, we do not just see each other as section mates, coworkers, or even musicians, but as whole humans, each with something incredible and vital to offer. To borrow a phrase from our voice teacher, Frank, "It's a beautiful thing."

Throughout my time as a choral fellow, I've listened to many Morning Prayers talks about how God sees and knows each of us in our entirety. Personally, I find this thought comforting, but also incomplete. I believe that, in order to be truly happy, we also need to feel seen by the people around us. We need to feel like our diverse talents are noticed, our multifaceted personalities engaged, and our individual voices heard and valued. It is not enough to feel like we always stand out or like we always blend in. We need both, and we need more. We need to feel lovingly visible.

I am so grateful for all of my fellow U Choristers who have made me feel lovingly visible. And I hope that, as a leader, I have helped make others feel this way, too.

Every Sunday, we raise our voices to God and say, in your light, we see light. Or in the original Hebrew, as I first heard it growing up, [foreign language 00:13:35].

My closing prayer for you all today is simple. As you leave this place, whether for a day, a summer, or a lifetime, may you always strive to shine your light on others and make them feel seen.

Laurie Sedgwick:

And now, please stand as you are able and let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us, 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.

Let us sing the hymn, God be with you 'Til We Meet Again, Number 90, found in your Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Choir/Congregation:

(Singing).

Laurie Sedgwick:

Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow. The same everlasting Creator who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow and every day. Either they will shield you from suffering or they will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace, then. Put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations, and say, continually, "The Lord is my strength and my shield. My heart has trusted them and I am helped. The Creator is not only with me, but in me, and I in them. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.