

Anna Burnham:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Anna Burnham:

And welcome to our last few days of morning prayers for the school year. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the Black Appleton Psalter Book, Psalm 8 found on page four. Please stand as you are able to read responsively by the whole verse.

Anna Burnham:

Oh, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth. You, who have covered the heavens with your splendor.

Congregation:

From the mouths of infants and sucklings, you have founded strength on account of your foes, to put an end to enemy and avenger.

Anna Burnham:

When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place.

Congregation:

What is man that you have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him.

Anna Burnham:

That you have made him little less than divine, and adorned him with glory and majesty.

Congregation:

You have made him master over your handiwork, laying the world at his feet.

Anna Burnham:

Sheep and oxen, all of them, the wild beasts too.

Congregation:

The birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, whatever travels the paths of the seas.

Anna Burnham:

Oh, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth.

Choir:
(singing)

Jenna Bao:
Hi. Good morning, everyone.

Congregation:
Morning.

Jenna Bao:
Thank you for being here. My name is Jenna Bao, and I'm honored to represent Quincy House to share a few words today. My reading will come from the book of Matthew 11:28-30, in which Jesus says, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you'll find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jenna Bao:
I am concentrated in history and literature and government with a focus in rights and justice systems, which means I've spent the last four years reading about all nature of judicial and political travesties that have made me clench my fists at my desk, rant for hours to people who absolutely did not ask, and even changed my professional trajectory.

Jenna Bao:
And yet, I chose these verses from Matthew because while I can think of countless texts that have made me rage, or laugh, or question, I can think of no other set of phrases that consistently triggers such a physical response for me. Ever since I first studied this passage in freshman year, these verses have yanked the tension right out of my shoulders when I hear them, like a breath I didn't know I was holding is ripped out of my lungs. For as long as I can remember, I have struggled with the concept of satisfaction. It seems like a nice concept for other people, a sweet kind of acceptance and complacency that people breed behind their white picket fences. I thought satisfaction seemed wonderful at first until, of course, you realized that obtaining satisfaction is like obtaining a one way ticket to mediocrity, a slow and steady decline made inevitable by peace and comfort.

Jenna Bao:
I grew up often hearing the Chinese proverb [foreign language 00:10:57], which is effectively meant to foster humility as a reminder, there is always someone greater than even the greatest person and skies beyond the highest sky. My takeaway, however, was that there was always another layer of untapped potential just waiting to be transfigured into greatness. And when the fatigue and stress compounded to feel like a golden anchor sitting squarely on my chest at times, I sometimes yearn for

satisfaction, almost as much as I feared the prospect of finding out who I would be without the constant striving.

Jenna Bao:

I had no intentions of coming to Harvard to learn about rest. I didn't come here to learn to be gentle and lowly in heart. Frankly, I hardly had intentions of coming here to learn about Jesus, but that's not exactly the story I'm telling today. Harvard did not teach me to rest because of its values. I'd like to think it taught me to rest in spite of them. Harvard students wear being laborious and heavy-laden like badges of honor. With the persistent pursuit of prestige, we act as if nothing easy and light could be worth obtaining.

Jenna Bao:

Harvard gave me the opportunity to chase after every extreme my anxieties and ambitions could come up with and showed me examples of people who embodied the platonic ideals of elite academia and career success, so I could see how empty and exhausting that the pursuit of these things to their extremes would be. I only realized I needed to set boundaries with my time and energy after I spent my freshman spring and 10 extracurriculars just find myself more dissatisfied than ever feeling I was underperforming at every turn.

Jenna Bao:

It took me spending a week depressed after receiving a score two points lower than my target on a standardized test to realize that holding onto an illusion of perfect control of my outcomes would only lead to a life of a disappointment. Throughout all this, people around me continued to express praise for my competence, which just made me further disillusioned about the ways we master projection and performance to keep one another in the rat race.

Jenna Bao:

All that is to say, in some ways on paper, it seems that Harvard would be one of the worst places I could have possibly gone to turn to faith, seek rest, and choose satisfaction. And yet, I've also come to see that it was only in a place like this that I, personally, at least, could have reconstructed the ways that I perceive myself and the world around me. And where does that leave me now, as I prepare to part from this place? It almost seems strange to say that I'm satisfied with the Harvard college experience that was half-plagued by global pandemic. And yet, I've had eight semesters characterized by great intellectual curiosity and growth, I've discovered a cause about which I'm passionate enough to shape my professional life. More importantly, I've developed a personal relationship with God that is far more robust than when I entered.

Jenna Bao:

I have not perfectly realigned my values, but I have determined it is at least worth it to try. I've laughed to the point of tears and stayed up talking all night countless times. I loved individuals and communities deeply, imperfectly, yet fervently, and

received much love in return. It almost seems strange to say that I am satisfied with this Harvard college experience, but I am pleasantly and gratefully surprised to say that, at present, I think I am.

Jenna Bao:

All right. Now, I will invite you all to bow our heads and join me in prayer. Dear heavenly Father, Lord, we thank you for this beautiful morning that you have gathered us together in order to praise you and begin this day with prayer. Lord, we just lift up your name in praise, and thank you for the joy and life and peace that you invite us into, and the ways in which you pursue us and design our paths, and just guide every step that we take such that you might be able to pursue us, and to transform us, and to shape us, and lead us as a shepherd does His sheep.

Jenna Bao:

Lord, I just pray that for the rest of this day and into the rest of this season, as this particular school year comes to a close, that you would continuously draw us to point our gaze towards you and to look at the ways that you are just drawing us near always. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Anna Burnham:

Please stand as you are able, and together, let us recite 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."

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, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Anna Burnham:

Amen. Together, let us sing the hymn, All People That On Earth Do Dwell, number one, found in your Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

Anna Burnham:

May the spirit and light of this day and the special spirit and light of this place watch over us and protect us on our journeys today and every day. Together, let us say amen.

This transcript was exported on May 02, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Congregation:

Amen.