

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning. Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the African Chapel of the Memorial Church. Our speaker this morning is Katie O'Dair, the Dean of Students at Harvard College and the newly appointed University Marshall. I invite you, please, to rise and join in saying our responsorial Psalm, which is number 66. Make a joyful noise unto God all ye lands.

Congregation:

Sing forth the honor of his name: make his praise glorious.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Come and see the works of God. He is terrible in his doing toward the children of men.

Congregation:

He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in him.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard.

Congregation:

Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.

Congregation:

I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay thee my vows.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble.

Congregation:

Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.

Choir:

(singing)

Katie O'Dair:

Have I lived enough? Have I loved enough? Have I considered right action enough? Have I come to any conclusion? Have I experienced happiness with sufficient gratitude? Have I endured loneliness with

grace? I say this, or perhaps I'm just thinking it. Actually, I probably think too much. Then I step out into the garden where the gardener who is said to be a simple man, is tending to his children, the roses.

This morning I want to talk about gratitude, specifically gratitude delayed, and will share a short story and then make a request of you to start the day. I have a daily practice of recognizing all the wonderful things in my life that I am grateful for, even the hard things, and I write them down in my journal. But this is a practice I started about 15 years ago and the delayed part of my gratitude story goes back 34 years. That is because it took me nearly 34 years to thank the professor who saved me from myself.

During my first year at college in the mid-eighties, I was to be generous, an average student. Thinking back now to the person and student I was then, is humbling, but that look back is important. For me, at the time, college was about exploration and that meant friendships, activities and all of the new experiences that come with the newfound freedom on campus. That is a nice way of saying I was a social student. Some might say that it has helped me, that it is what helped me make me a more relatable dean of students. Of course, there were my classes, but I remember academics being secondary to everything else.

All of that changed in the fall of my second year when I was informed that I was failing Botany 105, plant horticulture. In my defense, it was an 8:00 AM class that took place on the other side of campus and it was a course about house plants. How hard could that be? It turns out that if you don't go to class, it's hard to learn anything, especially both the common names of plants and their Latin or botanical name, because there was no Google at the time. As Fortune would have it, the faculty member teaching the course, intervened.

In order to pass the class, he said I needed to come to the greenhouse and learn every single plant and their botanical name for an entire week at 8:00 AM. He spent hours with me and I had a stack, and I still have the stack I should have brought it, of written index cards, painstakingly walking me through each plant, the genus species, other interesting facts. This teacher who could have easily let me fail, invested his time, energy, and kindness to ensure I did not. It was a remarkable act of caring, but it also did something else. It sparked in me a love of learning, something that had stayed with me the rest of my time at college and beyond. It also showed me that someone cared and noticed that something was not quite right.

Over the years I've thought about this pivotal moment, but not until recently have I had a sense of urgency in finding this teacher and thanking him. I set about through the typical channels, thankfully, that we have available today, Google, the department website, LinkedIn, and one day my sleuthing came up with the name Jack Kegan. Jack was the greenhouse manager and taught Botany at my university in 1986. And while he was recently retired as a faculty member, he was still teaching a wine appreciation course at my college. There's some irony there too.

I invited him to connect on LinkedIn and it turned out he was my professor. We talked for over an hour and he shared how much my reaching out meant to him that over his 30 plus year career, it was one of the greatest joys to help and encourage students, especially those who were struggling, and it was

wonderful to hear that he had made an impact. I told him I was sorry for waiting so long and he said the timing was perfect as he had just retired and it's never too late.

So this is my request. If there is someone in your life, a family member, teacher, coach, neighbor, friend who helped you in small ways and large, whether it was last week, last year, or over the last decade or two, reach out to thank them. It will make a difference. And just as they helped you, you never know how much you will help them. Gratitude delayed is just as sweet as gratitude in the moment, and sometimes even sweeter. Let us pray.

Thank you Lord, for this wonderful community, for this beautiful day and for the fellowship we share. Thank you for the people, places, and gifts you have given us and for the important lessons each has brought into our lives. Thank you for opening us in gratitude for those who have helped us in the past and for those who will help us all along our journey. Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

I invite you now. Please rise and join in saying the prayer Jesus taught. Let us pray. 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, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please join in singing our closing hymn number 201.

Choir/Congregation:

(singing).

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation, in the church, and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen. Let us bless the Lord.