

Cheyenne Boon:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning. Good morning. Good morning.

Cheyenne Boon:

Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book. Please rise, in body or spirits, to read Psalm 96 found on page 48.

Cheyenne Boon:

O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth.

Congregation:

Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; show forth his salvation from day to day.

Cheyenne Boon:

Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people.

Congregation:

For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods.

Cheyenne Boon:

Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength.

Congregation:

Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts.

Cheyenne Boon:

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.

Congregation:

Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously.

Cheyenne Boon:

Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof.

Congregation:

Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice.

Cheyenne Boon:

Before the Lord: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.

Choir:
(Singing).

Suzannah Omonuk:
Good morning, friends.

Congregation:
Good morning.

Suzannah Omonuk:
My name is Suzannah Omonuk and I am a third year Master of Divinity student at Harvard Divinity School. Today's reading is taken from Genesis 2:19-20.

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

In this Scripture of Genesis, we see for the first time humanity's divine mandate, to be a namer of the world and all that is in it. And what is in a name? Why did humankind evolve to find importance in words and sentences and narratives? All of our art, the great sculptures of the world, the literature of the poets, every invention from the alphabet to calculus, to astronomy, everything is born from that very human desire to name some facet of this world.

We have always been creatures of description and explanation. And at our best, we are doing this work diligently. We are doing this work well. We build schools, we write books, we preach and listen to sermons, all in an attempt to better understand this complex world in a way that we can then explain it to other people.

Given that I am providing this talk at one of the most academically rigorous institutions in the world, I am certain that we have all, at least in part, dedicated our lives to some aspect of this work. We are all in our respective ways the representative name givers of our academic communities. Among us are those that name the processes of biology, the laws of physics and of the land, the unfolding of history, and also the predictions of our future.

But unfortunately, we're living in an epoch in which this mission is being challenged daily. While the vast majority of people see the value in the honest and rigorous work of naming, of describing, of explaining, our deep mistrust of each other clouds this work heavily. We all witnessed this with the pandemic, right? Our healthcare workers shouted their vocal cords hoarse begging us, warning us of the impending doom that was to come if we didn't take the recommended precautions. Health workers and medical

providers, they did their job excellently, appropriately giving name to this virus, explaining its spread, describing its symptoms. The great tragedy was only our inability to listen and it cost us everything.

But why do I highlight this example? I'm persuaded that it is the power of the Word, whether written or spoken, that will transform our planet. If we all commit within our various and different respective disciplines, if we all committed to the honest, ethical, and truthful naming of the shared experience, we would move closer towards greater a understanding of ourselves and each other. But naming, naming requires a great deal of courage and steadfastness.

When men and women like Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela named the horrific discrimination they were facing racism, it gave the world a better understanding of what this evil was and how our societies can overcome it. But they also, of course, suffered tragic repercussions calling racism out by name. But by naming it, they exposed it, and then they set us in a trajectory for beginning to think about eradicating it.

We have all collectively witnessed or heard what gets repeated when great injustice happens in this country. School shootings, fatal incidents of police brutality, the inhumane treatment of immigrants at the border, we say, "There are no words," but are there really no words? Are there no words? No, I believe there are words, we're just too frightened and overwhelmed to utter them. The right words challenge, the right naming disturbs, it disrupts, and not everyone has the strength to sit in that. But we must remember that for as long as they remain no words to explain why somebody's baby caught a bullet in the heart today, there'll be no urgency to challenge the status quo. Our speechlessness, our incessant claims that there are no words is only an attempt to maintain a tight grip on a cheap umbrella during a storm we should all be standing naked under.

While in our various worlds as students, teachers, and witnesses of this great unfolding story of existence, let us name, let us describe, let us discuss, let us write. Only then will we hear sentences and phrases sharp enough to pierce through our selfishness, sharp enough to cut through the culture's political myopia and benign bipartisan irrationalities. Let us speak with passion words that are incandescent enough to set the apathy in the society ablaze. Let there be little fires in every legislative office and voting booth. Let us pronounce a judgment of fire upon the idealization of war and its weaponry, an arson of love upon the straw houses of indifference.

So while we depart from here, may we feel the sacred burden of being a namer. Revel in the power that you have to assign meaning and language to everything under the sun, but you must also feel humbled by that power. Because once you realize that everyone else has it too, you will learn that half of the work is to really listen to each other as we work together towards the redemption of our world. Thank you.

Please rise, in body or in spirit, and join me in prayer.

You who established the pillars of the earth, guard our hearts and guide our feet so we might be now and ever faithful to your world-transforming covenant. We pray in Jesus's name, who prays with us as

we seek your kingdom 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.

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

Cheyenne Boon:

Please join in singing hymn number 36, My Soul, Awake, and Render.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing).

Cheyenne Boon:

As we go into this day, let us bless and keep one another. Let us make peace. Let us be at peace. May it so, and may the church say Amen.

Congregation:

Amen. Amen.