

Courtney Godwin:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Courtney Godwin:

Welcome to morning prayers. For all who are able, please rise for our responsive reading, psalm number 62, found in your black psalter.

Courtney Godwin:

For God alone, my soul waits in silence. From him comes my salvation.

Congregation:

He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress. I shall not be greatly moved.

Courtney Godwin:

For God alone, my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.

Congregation:

He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress. I shall not be shaken.

Courtney Godwin:

On God rests my deliverance and my honor, my mighty rock. My refuge is God.

Congregation:

Trust in him at all times, oh people. Pour out your heart before him. God is a refuge for us.

Courtney Godwin:

Men of low estate are but a breath. Men of high estate are a delusion. In the balances they go up. They are together lighter than a breath.

Congregation:

Put no confidence in extortion. Set no vain hopes on robbery. If riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

Courtney Godwin:

Once God has spoken, twice that I heard this, that power belongs to God.

Congregation:

And that to thee, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For thou dost requite a man according to his work.

Courtney Godwin:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing).

Courtney Godwin:

Our reading this morning comes from the children's book Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, which just celebrated its 75th anniversary last month. This might seem a little bit anachronistic for before 9:00 AM, but I hope you'll bear with me. The section is from the final third of the book. "Goodnight comb, goodnight brush. Goodnight nobody, goodnight mush. And goodnight to the old lady whispering hush. Goodnight stars. Goodnight air. Goodnight noises everywhere."

If you know this book, which I hope many of you do, you know that the entire thing is just a list of items and a reiteration of the same list of items to give each item a good night. It could be my grocery list, and it would be no more interesting. But like many picture books, at least half of the story comes through in the illustrations. Goodnight Moon features a small bunny curled up in bed and a larger bunny sitting in a rocking chair at the end of the bed as the child approaches sleep. It seems pretty basic, but at its core, Goodnight Moon is a story about paying attention and accompanying.

A small bunny sees each item in the room, really sees them. No matter how small or how seemingly unimportant, each item is seen, is recognized, and is held in the love of the child wishing it a good night, even if just for a moment. Paying attention is an act of love. Throughout the bedtime ritual, the quiet old lady in the rocking chair accompanies the young rabbit. She says nothing more than hush, but her presence in the room provides a sense of security and love.

When I was a small child, whenever my younger sister or I would get fussy, my mom would begin to recite "In the great green room," and almost immediately, we would fall quiet and go still. But it didn't just work on us. My mom would notice her own breathing deepen, her own heart rate slow.

I forgot about this practice for many years, almost 20, until the pandemic started. One of my good friends hosted a Zoom birthday party in late March of 2020, and she asked each of her friends present to give a short presentation on something they loved as a present to her. In a last minute rush, I grabbed Goodnight Moon off the shelf of childhood books we couldn't bear to donate. If nothing else, I could gift Lauren a much-needed moment of quiet serenity as the world felt like it was falling apart.

After my friend John, who's the aerospace engineer, gave a presentation about literal rocket science, I was feeling just a little bit insecure. What kind of birthday party causes so much stress? When my turn came, there were a few giggles. Clearly, I was not one of the more prepared. But once I started reading, the atmosphere changed. I could feel my friends' breaths catching, and I could see their shoulders drop from their ears as they released a tension they didn't know they were holding. At the end, we all stayed quiet a moment. No one wanted to break the spell. After that, I've memorized the words to Goodnight Moon for myself, and I began to recite them regularly. When the world moved too quickly for me to keep up, or when I felt as if I were spinning out of control, I would return to the great green room.

The words became my quiet old lady whispering hush. They accompanied me whenever and wherever I called upon them. The words also became my little bunny calling a loving attention to the space I inhabited, grounding me in the present moment. It can be really hard to pay attention. I read the news every morning. I often just feel so defeated. There's so much work to be done, and so much of it is beyond my capacity. But when I encounter the suffering of the world, I call upon the ministry of Goodnight Moon. The words minister to me so that I can ministry to others. And if nothing else, I can offer the same ministries of Goodnight Moon: attention and accompaniment.

Will all who are able please rise for prayer? Let us pray. Loving Creator, we thank you for your constant accompaniment in our lives even when we doubt your presence. Help us to remember that our loving presence is a ministry to the world around us. And help us to use that gift in service of you and your love. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

And together, let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying:

All:

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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

Now let us sing the hymn Lord Jesus Think On Me, number 212, found in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

Courtney Godwin:

The next time that you need to slow down, and the world seems to be moving too fast, I encourage you to think about what your Goodnight Moon might look like, what grounds you and accompanies you so that you can do this thing for others. If you'll indulge me just a minute. Good morning, alter. Good morning, psalter. Good morning to the Mem Church choir. Good morning to this steeple spire. Good morning, all you lovely faces. May you find comfort even in the smallest places. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.