

Cheyenne Boon:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning. Good morning.

Cheyenne Boon:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. Please rise, in body or spirits and join in our responsive Psalm reading Number 83, found on page 42.

Oh God, do not be silent. Do not hold, aloof. Do not be quiet, O God.

Congregation:

For your enemies rage. Your foes assert themselves.

Cheyenne Boon:

They plot craftily against your people. Take counsel against your treasured ones.

Congregation:

Let us wipe them out as a nation. Israel's name will be mentioned no more.

Cheyenne Boon:

Unanimous in their council, they have made an alliance against you.

Congregation:

O my God, made them like thistle down like stubble driven by the wind.

Cheyenne Boon:

As a fire burns a forest, as flames scorch the hills-

Congregation:

... pursue them with your tempest, terrify them with your storm.

Cheyenne Boon:

Cover their faces with shame so that they seek your name O Lord.

Congregation:

May they be frustrated and terrified, disgraced and doomed forever.

Cheyenne Boon:

May they know that your name, yours alone, is the Lord, supreme over all the earth.

Choir:

(singing)

Varsha Ghosh:

Thank you. To begin, I start with a quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. "Faith is taking first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." I must admit, I was surprised when I received the invitation to speak at Morning Prayers prayers from a woman of reluctant faith. Yet the work that I do demands a high level of faith in humanity. What do I do, you might ask? I promote civic engagement on this campus. This means that I must believe that service and advocacy and belief in the essential goodness of people will lead to equity and justice for all, and I do. But lately, I have been asking myself what faith in the form of religion has in promoting social justice.

We have the icons of the Reverend Martin Luther King, and Dorothy Day, Bishop Desmond Tutu. Even Hinduism, my faith, has worked towards social justice with the song of the Nithyananda. We also have examples of faith leaders who distort religious reasoning to promote unjust actions. How is it possible that the practice of faith or religion can go either way? I don't know. I can only reflect on mine and my family's journey in faith.

My family is originally from India, and we are Hindus. In keeping with the faith, my parents kept a small shrine in their room, a small table specifically for daily prayers. The shrine was a version of what you would see in any Hindu temple, but smaller. Tiny icons of Ganesha and Krishna, Vishnu, Ahalya, a Diya candle holder, small brass plates on which to offer, place offerings and incense.

My parents prayed every day, and so I pray every day. Every morning and every evening I would be summoned to do my prayers. With incense wafting around me, I would kneel, hands in prayer pose, and I would repeat the mantras they told me to repeat, and then touch my head to the floor.

We weren't particularly religious in any other way. For example, we ate beef. We lived in Queens, New York, with neighbors who reflected all of the faiths. My parents put up a Christmas tree because it made my sister and I happy. They encouraged us to take part in Sabbath dinners hosted by our Jewish friends, attend Catholic mass when invited, and passed on the love from just the people.

One morning, when I was called to pray, I looked up, and there was a picture of Jesus. And I said, "Mom, that's Jesus. Why is he there on the prayer table?" And my mom's response was, "The minister from the church that hosts [inaudible 00:09:14] gave us that. He's a God, so he's with the other gods." Jesus is still there on my parents' prayer table. They taught me to say, "As-Salaam-Alaikum", as a greeting to those who identified as Muslim.

Given my parents pluralistic attitude towards religion, I was surprised to see my dad, along with many of my aunts and uncles, embrace Hindu nationalism. It seemed counter to everything I've been taught by them. I can only think that because we did in fear and trauma. My parents and many of their friends survived the partition of India, a civil war between Hindus and Muslims. When the colonial powers divide that Hindu, India into Muslim majority Pakistan and Hindu majority of India. My dad is now in his 80s. Are those memories of that what he done, why suddenly he's embracing a certain version of his faith that divides? The same faith that taught me, he taught me unity. Certainly, the rhetoric of religious fundamentalists around the world is always couched in fear of something, something different. Is that where this is coming from? If it is, how do we address the fear? How do you make someone appreciate difference? That change is good, and understand that it'll be all okay. I don't know, which is why I offer this prayer.

May the divine being who is the Father in heaven of the Christians, holy one of the Jewish faith, all of the Muslims, Buddha of the Buddhists, Tao of the Taoists, Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Great

Spirit of the Native Americans, and Brahman of the Hindus, lead us from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality. May we be granted strength, freedom, and clear understanding. May we learn to see God in our own hearts and in everyone around us. May God bless us all, and fill our hearts with gratitude, grace, and love. Peace. Peace, peace be unto all. Shanti, shanti, shanti.

Cheyenne Boon:

Please rise in body or spirits, and join in saying the words that Jesus taught us, saying...

Congregation:

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, they 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 347, I sought God's love in sun and stars.

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 be so, and may the church say, Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.