

Cheyenne Boon:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Cheyenne Boon:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the Black Appleton Psalter book. Please rise, in body or spirits, to read Psalm 118, found on page 59.

Praise the Lord for He is good, His steadfast love is eternal.

Congregation:

Let Israel declare His steadfast love is eternal.

Cheyenne Boon:

Let the house of Aaron declare His steadfast love is eternal.

Congregation:

Let those who fear the Lord declare His steadfast love is eternal.

Cheyenne Boon:

In distress, I called on the Lord. The Lord answered me and brought me relief.

Congregation:

The Lord is on my side. I have no fear. What can man do to me?

Cheyenne Boon:

Open the gates of victory for me that I may enter them and praise the Lord.

Congregation:

This is the gateway to the Lord, the victorious shall enter through it.

Cheyenne Boon:

I praise you, for you have answered me and have become my deliverance.

Congregation:

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

Cheyenne Boon:

This is the Lord's doing, it is marvelous in our sight.

Congregation:

This is the day that the Lord has made, let us exalt and rejoice in it.

Choir:

(singing)

Adefemi Akinsanya:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Adefemi Akinsanya:

My name is Adefemi Akinsanya, and I'm in an international correspondent and anchor at Arise News based in Lagos, Nigeria. Though, I'm currently a fellow at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism here at Harvard. It's an honor to be here, and I'd like to thank Reverend Potts for his gracious invitation; as well as Teresa, Cheyenne, and Harriet for such a warm welcome to the Memorial Church here this morning. Thank you.

I know belief in Christianity is not a prerequisite for worship or attendance here, but as unfamiliar as I am with the Bible in its entirety, there are paragraphs, pages, and passages that have stuck with my family and I over the years. There are actually quite a few favorites. So when I was asked to share a word, there was competition. I debated furiously over what to share with you, which quote to share, whether or not to sprinkle you all with a psalm, or perhaps to choose a secular text all together.

But I decided on a passage from Ephesians, which reads, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Clothe yourself with the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you've done everything to stand, stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the good news of peace."

I'd like to talk to you all this morning about the beauty of strength. We're all comfortable with the fact that having physical strength is a virtue, a good thing. The ability to get out of bed, to bring all of the shopping from your car in one trip instead of three, and being able to lift weights at the gym, are always in which we enjoy, or develop, or understand the physical strength. But that's not the type of strength I'm talking about.

October 20th was just a few days ago, and it was a tough day for me, as it was for many Nigerians around the world. In marked two years since the night the Nigerian military put down weeks of growing anti-police brutality protests. Despite pockets of violence and vandalism in different areas, that day, that light at that place, the Lekki toll gate in Lagos, it's been independently adjudicated that unarmed protestors were shot at and killed, men and women. People never made it home that night, or the morning after, and they still haven't made it home two years later.

As I said, the protestors at the toll gate were unarmed. They certainly didn't have the caliber of weapons that were used against them, but they posed a serious threat in their unity, their sense of duty, their resourcefulness. That's the strength I'm talking about. That's the defining ingredient in being a change maker.

My mother has that strength in abundance. She was born and raised in a small but proud town of Ijebu-Ode in southwest Nigeria. And she had the strength to leave her home, her mother, her siblings, leave everything she knew on the chance life would be different on foreign land.

When you are born out of that type of sacrifice, you let that legacy energize you, rather than intimidate you. So I remember that. Despite being born and raised in inner city northwest London, and falling into certain statistical categories, the odds weren't against me. I chose a career that led me to Nigeria, where a clash with the police led me to ask a question, which brought me to Harvard to learn how to answer it, that journey starting with strength.

As we prepare to leave the warmth of this setting, let us remember to reignite our strength. But please be aware that strength is also in small great things. Embody your spirit. It's standing up tall, it's sitting up straight. It's making eye contact. It's saying thank you. It's in asking for forgiveness, and in showing vulnerability. I challenge us all to wear that armor, God's armor, that belt of truth and breastplate of righteousness. That uniform is glorious. It's strength, and that strength is beautiful. Thank you.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this day. And together, we pray that you continue to bless us with long, healthy, successful life. I pray that you continue to protect us from sudden, violent, and unnatural death, and you guide us all of the days of our lives. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Cheyenne Boon:

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

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 336, Shall We Gather at the River, found in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

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.