

Courtney Godwin:

Good morning. Welcome to morning prayers. Our speaker this morning is Dean Melissa Bartholomew, DS. All who are able to stand for a responsive reading, Psalm 136 down in your black psalter.

"Oh, give thanks unto the Lord for he is good, for his mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

O give thanks unto the God of God; for his mercy endureth forever.

Courtney Godwin:

To him that by wisdom made the heavens, for his mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Courtney Godwin:

To him that made great lights, for his mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Courtney Godwin:

The moon and the stars to rule by night, for his mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Courtney Godwin:

Who giveth food to all flesh, for his mercy endureth forever."

Congregation:

O give thanks unto the God of Heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Courtney Godwin:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(Singing)

Melissa Bartholomew:

Good morning. My reflection this morning, my reflections are rooted in a poem by a black woman named Nayyirah Waheed. Her poem is entitled Therapy, and it's found in her book of poetry entitled Salt. I believe it resonates with the teachings of Jesus found in the sixth chapter of the gospel of Matthew. She writes, "The hard season will split you through. Do not worry, you will bleed water. Do not worry, this is grief. Your face will fall out and down in your skin, and there will be scorching. But do not worry. Keep speaking the years from their hiding places. Keep coughing up smoke for all the deaths you have died. Keep the rage tender because the soft season will come. It will come loud, ready, gulping, both hands in your chest, up all night, up all of the nights to drink all damage into love."

A couple of years ago, I was in the midst of finishing my dissertation, which explored the impact of racism and oppression on the mental health and wellbeing of black people in this country, and factors that cultivate in some black people desire to die. I also explored the role of spirituality, culture, and vision enabling some to resist that desire. Writing about black pain is hard. The context, you have to lay out, the details about centuries of trauma and torture that began on the slave ships and is continued in various degrees throughout generations must be examined before you can even begin to try to understand the data. It's more than research and analysis. It's grief work. It's sacred, ancestral work, and it hemmed me in.

So when I read what he's poem during that time, I realized that it described my journey through this terrain. "The hard season," she says, "will split you through." I had been writing about how the hard season has split through so many black people, and how it now more than ever has created an environment where some lose hope and want to give up. Some no longer have the capacity to see beyond the challenges of world in front of them. But in the midst of the grief, Waheed encourages us. "Do not worry," she says.

As a Christ centered minister of the gospel of love and justice, my charge is always to speak the truth and love and to shed light away through. So I am compelled to address Waheed's called not to worry. "Do not worry," she says three times. It mirrors the passage in the gospel of Matthew, chapter six, where Jesus reminds us not to worry. He repeats it three times. He also tells us to take no thought for our lives, and to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, and all things will be added unto us.

Worry gets in the way. It impedes our capacity to hope, imagine, and envision a new world, and to see the world of God's eyes. But the question is, how do we refrain from worry? I take lessons from my ancestors. One of the ancestors I'm learning from is the late black educator, Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of Bethune-Cookman College. In her spiritual autobiography, Bethune, whose parents had been enslaved, and were people of strong faith and character, credits her faith in God and her deep connection to God for her capacity to lead work for the betterment of black people. She talks about the impact of her spiritual practices and she says, "I believe that spiritual growth comes with meditation and communion. When alone, I sit with God." These practices helped Bethune to not be consumed by worry, to cultivate hope, and to imagine to see the world through God's eyes.

She explains, quote, "I am blessed with the power to visualize and see a mental picture of what I desire. I'm always building spiritual air castles," she says. "Only those with spiritual understanding can appreciate the feeling when I say that I saw in my mind's eye the Bethune-Cookman College of today." Bethune was also a love warrior. She shares how deeply immersed she was in her parents' love and says,

quote, "Love, not hate, has been the fountain of my boldness." This is how Bethune kept her rage tender and protected her heart from hate and worry.

At Harvard, at this time, we are called to be radical visionaries and work towards advancing a vision of a new world, the world that God sees, a world healed of racism and oppression. If we practice seeking God first in our own way, to stay in communion with God and rooted in love, we will be able to endure the hard seasons, cease from worry, keep our rage tender, and transform the world's damage into love. Amen. Let us pray. Dear Lord, help us to know, like Mary McLeod Bethune knew, that we can shield ourselves from worry and expand our capacity to imagine a new world, to see the world through your eyes, through our intimacy with you. Draw us to you through your son Jesus Christ, and help us to keep our rage tender through your love as we carry out the pursuit of justice and the liberation, the pursuit of racial justice and healing for all. Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

All who are able, please rise for the Lord's prayer. 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. Please join in singing the hymn Lord God of Morning and Night, hymn number 39 found in the crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing)

Courtney Godwin:

Lord of light, in the hard season, feels like it is splitting us through. Help us to not worry. Help us to hope, to imagine, and to envision a new world, the world that you see. The soft season will come. Amen.