

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 spirit and join in reading Hymn ... Psalm, excuse me, number 155 found on page 79.

In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob."

Congregation:

Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob."

Cheyenne Boon:

That He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Congregation:

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Cheyenne Boon:

He shall judge between many peoples and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away. They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.

Congregation:

They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.

Cheyenne Boon:

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn more anymore. With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?

Congregation:

With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?

Cheyenne Boon:

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Congregation:

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Cheyenne Boon:

Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O mortal, what is good and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Congregation:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

Choir:

(singing)

Timothy Patrick McCarthy:

Thank you, choir. Good morning people.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Timothy Patrick McCarthy:

A reading from James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 1963. "It is the responsibility of free people to trust and to celebrate what is constant. Birth, struggle and death are constant and so is love, though we may not always think so and to apprehend the nature of change, to be able and willing to change. I speak of change not on the surface. But in the depths, change in the sense of renewal. But renewal becomes impossible, if one supposes things to be constant that are not. Safety, for example, or money or power. One clings to these like chimeras, by which one can only be betrayed and the entire hope, the entire possibility for freedom disappears." There ends for reading.

I've been thinking a lot recently about change, what causes it, what confounds it and why we crave it. As a historian who is also an educator and an activist, I've spent much of my life trying to comprehend and create change. After all at its root, history is the study of change over time, and to deny change is to deny history.

One of my growing concerns lately is just how often I hear some version of the phrase, nothing has changed. I hear this most often these days frankly, from young people, from fellow progressive people, as well as people who live on the downside of discrimination and on the outside of power and privilege. I understand the impulse, the exasperated impulse behind this claim. I do, and I appreciate the rhetorical power of its provocation. That too, I feel.

I felt these things too, and I would be lying to you if I told you that those words and that phrase have never left my lips. But this way of thinking is dangerous and I want to spend my short time this morning reflecting on why I believe that is. For starters, it's dishonest. It is simply not true that nothing has changed.

Think about your own life. There's nothing different now from when you were a child. Is there nothing you've been able to do in your life? Vote, take birth control. In my case, marry my husband, that someone like you from an earlier time was prohibited from doing. Did all of us tweet from the crib?

In all seriousness, change is all around us. Granted, we may not be fully satisfied with the pace of change and we may be rightly concerned, even terrified about the backlash against certain kinds of progress. Voting rights, reproductive rights, marriage rights, but that is not the same thing as claiming that there is no change.

In fact, when we think about the long histories of these rights to struggle something I've spent my life doing, it is precisely the fact of change. The power it represents, the threat that it holds, to the status quo and those who seek to preserve it, that causes these fierce backlashes. The assault on voting rights, the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, the wave of anti LGBTQ bills sweeping our State Houses. This is what I call in my work, the paradox of progress. The historical reality that forces of reaction and retrogression are always contending with the forces of progress. This conflict is the engine of history and it is the incubator for change.

Secondly, to deny the fact that change is also, I think, to disrespect those who came before us. I like to describe history as a conversation across the grave with the elders and the ancestors. Among the things that drew me to history in the first place were the many stories I heard and read as a young person, of ordinary folks who struggled mightily against the odds and achieved astonishing victories. Abolitionists and civil rights organizers, feminists and queer activists, labor activists and peace advocates, all those rebels and revolutionaries throughout history who have bravely fought injustice and prejudice, inequality and empire.

Far more often than not, these people took much greater risks and suffered much greater consequences than many of us of the subsequent and rising generations can even imagine. As a result, I believe that we have a responsibility to acknowledge their labor and honor their legacy.

I recently moved from Cambridge to Provincetown, a place I like to describe as a little slice of queer heaven at the end of America. It is a home to misfits rich with history. Scarcely a day goes by without the chance to meet an older member of our community, who remembers earlier days of oppression and liberation and loss. I remember one such encounter, talking with an older gay man now in his 70s, who moved to Provincetown in the late '80s when he was diagnosed with HIV. "I came here to die," he told me matter-of-factly and then smiled sweetly and added, "I guess that didn't work out."

Talking to people like him, this trailblazing generation of out LGBTQ elders, who survived the plague days and so much else is like living queer history. These conversations are a constant blessing to me. A regular reminder of who did what to make someone like me even possible. I could not have these encounters or appreciate these experiences, if I were a change denier. Perhaps worst of all, the denial of change is disempowering. No one in this room needs to be reminded how tough a time this is. We are living in a world at risk.

Democratic institutions and governments under siege. We've got way too many folks without health insurance and way too many folks incarcerated. We have a racial injustice problem. We have a climate crisis problem. We have a poverty problem and a wealth gap problem. We have a mental health crisis and gun addiction problem. We have daily assaults against immigrants and people of color and women and queer people. We have a rights problem, a hate problem and a fear problem. We've got all sorts of problems.

It can be overwhelming to face this all the time. Despair is real, especially in this age of disruption and disinformation and division. But to deny the existence of change or worse, its possibility is to double

down on this despair. Something we can ill afford at this moment in history. It deadens our capacity to imagine ourselves as change agents in our own time, to become makers of history.

Perhaps worst of all, it gives us an excuse not to try at all to opt out of history. But as James Baldwin challenged us more than half a century ago, we must negotiate this passage as nobly as possible for the sake of those who are coming after us. In these most treacherous of times, let us renew our commitment to His charge. My prayer this morning is this, that we use whatever time we have left in this life to step into history and become agents of change in our own rights. Understanding that change is never inevitable or irreversible, but neither is it impossible.

Cheyenne Boon:

Please rise, in body or spirit and join me in prayer. O Heavenly Father in whom we live and move and have our being, we humbly pray Thee so to guide and govern us by thy Holy Spirit. That in all the cares and occupations of our life, we may not forget being, but may remember that we are ever walking in that sight through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Cheyenne Boon:

Please join in saying the prayer that Jesus taught us saying, Our Father who are 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 we 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 are 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 we 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 27, We Gather Together To Ask For Lord's Blessing.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

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.