

Courtney Godwin:

Good morning. A quick announcement before we get started this morning. Tomorrow is Veterans Day, and we will have a morning prayer service. Our speaker tomorrow will be Major Rooney Yadlin and we look forward to seeing you then. This morning, our speaker is Laurie Sedgwick, a familiar face to many. For all who are able, will you please stand for our responsive reading, psalm number 46, found in your black psalter. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help and trouble.

Congregation:

Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

Courtney Godwin:

Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled. Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.

Congregation:

There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.

Courtney Godwin:

God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. God shall help her and that right early.

Congregation:

The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted.

Courtney Godwin:

The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.

Congregation:

Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth.

Courtney Godwin:

He maketh wars to cease until the end of the earth. He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear asunder. He burneth the chariot in the fire.

Congregation:

Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

Courtney Godwin:

The Lord hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge. You may be seated.

Choir:

(Singing)

Laurie Sedgwick:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Laurie Sedgwick:

It's such an honor and a gift to be here with all of you, speaking again from this lectern, in this beautiful and holy space, among this loving church family, on a day to honor veterans. My inspirational reading comes from Howard Thurman's work, *Disciplines of the Spirit*.

"The meaning of commitment as a discipline of the spirit must take into account that mind and spirit cannot be separated from the body in any absolute sense. It has been wisely said that the time and the place of man's life on earth is the time and place of his body, but the meaning of his life is as significant and eternal as he wills to make it. While he is on this earth, his mind and spirit are domiciled in his body, bound up in a creature who is at once a child of nature and God. Commitment means that it is possible for a man to yield the nerve center of his consent to a purpose or cause, a movement or an ideal, which may be more important to him than whether he lives or dies. The commitment is a self conscious act of will, by which he affirms his identification with what he is committed to. The character of his commitment is determined by that to which the center or core of his consent is given."

I am five weeks into my chaplaincy internship in spiritual care at Beverly Hospital. Our calling in spiritual care, and a great tender privilege it is, is to provide emotional and spiritual care to patients, families, and hospital staff. As our supervisor puts it, to anyone who walks through those hospital doors. On my first day of making rounds, the first patient that I visited was a 97 year old man with an extraordinary spirit and presence of mind. He also happened to be a veteran of the US Navy. A veteran myself, I felt an instant connection and camaraderie with this man I will call Jim, and also wondered to myself whether there was some divine intervention in action in our meeting. Jim was happy to engage in conversation, and during the course of our exchange, I learned two key things. One, he was extremely proud of his 25 years in the US Navy, of which he spoke with enthusiasm and at some length. And two, that he was ready to pass on.

As he stated definitively, and even somewhat defiantly, his conscience was clear. He was ready to go. He'd met his commitments. Jim's resolve and calm without a hint of despondency both astounded and somewhat unsettled me. How does one possess such composure at the end of life? I think Thurman's words have something to do with this. Thurman's treatise says that in order to make a true commitment, we need to know ourselves. Who we are, what we want in life, and how we propose to get it. Jim certainly seemed to know the answer to those questions. I have no doubt that his military service seemed to help him to a great extent define his sense of self. Jim proudly told me about a self-published book that he had written that chronicles how his service in the US Navy essentially rescued him from a life of poverty. He joined the Navy at age 17, and served in the submarine service spanning World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the Cold War.

It was clear that he took joy in recounting the stories of his life on the submarine, and especially talking about the soldiers with whom he'd served. I believe Jim's piece with his passing was linked to his life's commitment to a cause he felt greater than himself. His commitment was, in the words of Thurman, more important to him than whether he lives or dies. His military service, the soldiers he served with, the sense of duty in serving his country, addressed the questions of who he was and provided a focus for his commitment. Reflecting on my military experience, I know that the commitment that I felt, my father

and my father's father felt, both who served in the military for over 20 years, that my fellow soldiers felt to serve, was to commit to this greater cause. To, as the slogan of the US Army War College states, not to promote war, but to preserve peace.

Although I am no longer in the army, my veteran status provides me with a sense of pride, and to this day inspires a persistent striving to be of service in a way that I can best utilize my gifts in this lifetime. In my reflection for these words today, I imagined a conversation with Howard Thurman, and asked his perspective on Veterans Day. I believe Thurman would recognize our veterans for their service, would affirm their personal commitment and sacrifice, and suggest that their commitment, any commitment, would only truly be complete, however, were it rooted in the power of the Spirit of God. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Won't you please pray with me? God of peace, we pray for those who have served our nation, and have laid down their lives to protect and defend our freedom. We pray for those who have fought, whose spirits and bodies are scarred by war, whose nights are haunted by memories too painful for the light of day. We pray for those who serve us now, especially for those in harm's way. Shield them from danger and bring them home. Turn the hearts and minds of our leaders and our enemies to the work of justice, and a harvest of peace. May the peace you left us, the peace you gave us, be the peace that sustains us, the peace that saves us. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Laurie Sedgwick:

And now please stand as you are able so we can recite the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying, our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

And now please stand as you are able so we can recite the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying, our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

Please join in hymn number 260, City of God, How broad and Far.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing)

Courtney Godwin:

May the grace of Christ and the Father's boundless love, and the Holy Spirit's favor rest upon you. Thus may we abide in union with each other and the Lord, and possess in sweet communion joys which earth cannot afford. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.