

Cheyenne Boon:

Good morning. Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the Black Appleton Salter book. Please rise in body or spirit to read Psalm number 67 found on page 34. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us.

Congregation:

That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving power among all nations.

Cheyenne Boon:

Let the peoples praise thee oh God. Let all the peoples praise thee.

Congregation:

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for thou dost judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth.

Cheyenne Boon:

Let the people's praise thee oh God. Let all the people's praise thee.

Congregation:

The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.

Cheyenne Boon:

God has blessed us. Let all the ends of the earth fear him.

Choir:

(Singing)

The Rev. Cody Sanders:

A reading from Audre Lorde first spoken at the Modern Language Association in 1977. What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own until you will sicken and die of them still in silence? Perhaps for some of you here today, and I'm the face of one of your fears because I am a woman, because I am black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself, a black woman, warrior poet, doing my work, come to ask you, are you doing yours?

Queer stories have long emerged from circumstances of prolonged silence. Silences that kept us from finding one another. Silences that keep us from knowing one another. Silences that keep us from knowing something of ourselves because we never knew the stories of those who came before us in whose image we could see something of our own life and something of the divine. Speaking the words we need to say is never without fear Lorde says, fear of visibility of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment of pain of death. And in this church we are called to remember those who came before us, whose voices were silenced by this very fear of judgment and pain and death.

It was Harvard President, Abbott Lawrence Lowell who oversaw the building of this memorial church that now graces our campus as a space of inclusivity and justice. But a decade prior it was also Lowell who created and oversaw Harvard's secret Court, which engaged in the purge of gay students and

faculty from campus in 1920. And some of those 30 young men who fell victim to that cruelty likely sat in the former Appleton Chapel in morning prayers, tyrannies swallowed day by day until some sickened and died of them still in silence.

My standing here as a queer Baptist minister in this pulpit is an act unimaginable to my queer ancestors with whom I am connected through time and space and without whom I would not be here. So we tell their stories, what little we know of them because queer people always know that there are some who did not make it here with us. As we gather here on this very day, the Harvard community is missing one of our own trans siblings. In August, before his cohort at the Kennedy School returned to campus to begin their second year together, Rodrigo Ventocilla died in police custody while on his honeymoon with his spouse Sebastian in Indonesia.

Rodrigo's mother Anna said Rodrigo had been a fighter since he was very young. He would ask his mother's permission to go to LGBTQ+ demonstrations in Peru and she would often go with him. And Rodrigo created the kind of community among trans people here at Harvard where folks could find one another and build community together and tell their stories and celebrate the goodness of life together. And we speak his name and tell his story in this sacred space because he should be with us. So we refuse to let him go into the silence.

When queer people gather to tell our stories, we regularly move from the mood of memorial to the temperament of a tea dance because we know that if we do not tell the stories and invoke the names of those who did not make it here with us, then no one else will. Yet queer people know better than most the truth spoken by that 12th century Saint Hildegard of Bingen, that every creature is a glittering, glistening mirror of divinity. And the stories of our glittering, glistening queer siblings are the stories that will sustain us and draw us together into community and help us to know something of ourselves that we could not know alone and in silence. And our queer stories, glittering and glistening as mirrors of the divine, which many eyes have grown to dull to see are the stories we need to tell.

So we find the words we did not know we had and we spit out the tyrannies of silence we've attempted to swallow because they are not our own. And we tell the queer stories that we refuse to let go into the silence. And it sounds like morning and it sounds like dancing.

Will you join your hearts in prayer. Liven our imaginations to see the glittering, glistening divinity reflected in every creature. Loosen our tongues to speak the words we do not yet have. Bolster our courage to do the work that is ours to do in your many and holy names we pray. Amen.

Cheyenne Boon:

Please rise in body or spirit and join in saying the prayer that Jesus taught us. Saying 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 people. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen. Please join in singing hymn number 218, oh love of God, how strong and true.

Congregation:

(Singing)

Cheyenne Boon:

And now 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.

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