

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 Salter book. Please rise in body or spirit, and join in saying Psalm 77 found on page 39.

"I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me.

Congregation:

In the day of my trouble, I seek the Lord. In the night my hand is stretched out without wearying, my soul refuses to be comforted.

Cheyenne Boon:

I think of God, and I moan. I meditate and my spirit faints.

Congregation:

Thou dost hold my eyes from closing. I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

Cheyenne Boon:

I consider the days of old. I remember the years long ago.

Congregation:

I commune with my heart in the night. I meditate and search my spirit.

Cheyenne Boon:

Will the Lord spurn forever and never again be favorable?

Congregation:

Has his steadfast love forever cease? Are his promises at an end for all time?

Cheyenne Boon:

Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?

Congregation:

And I'm sure that it is my grief that the right hand the Most High has changed.

Cheyenne Boon:

I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord. Yay, I will remember thy wonders of old.

Congregation:

I will meditate on all thy work, and muse on thy mighty deeds."

Choir:

(Singing)

Benjamin Dunning:

This is a reading from an early Christian text from the [inaudible 00:06:33] literature known simply as the Untitled Treatise. It's a retelling of the creation of Eve.

"Now the creation of the instructor came about as follows. When wisdom let fall a droplet of light, it flowed onto the water and immediately a human being appeared. That droplet she then molded as a female body. Now Adam was abandoned as an inanimate vessel in that no spirit was in him. So wisdom sent her daughter, being called Eve, as an instructor in order that she might make Adam who had no soul, arise. When Eve saw her male counterpart prostrate, she had pity on him and said, "Adam become alive, arise upon the earth." Immediately her word became accomplished fact, for Adam having arisen, suddenly opened his eyes. When he saw her, he said, "You shall be called mother of the living, for it you who have given me life."

But when the authorities were informed that Adam was alive and had arisen, they were greatly troubled. When they saw Eve talking to him, they said to one another, "What sort of thing is this luminous woman? For she resembles that divine likeness which appeared to us in the light. Now come, let us lay hold of her so that when she becomes soiled, she may not be able to ascend into her light. But let us not tell Adam. Rather, let us bring a deep sleep over him and let us instruct him in his sleep to the effect that she came from his rib in order that his wife may obey and he may be Lord over her." But Eve, being a force, laughed at their decision. She put mist into their eyes. Then, entering a great state of fear, the blind creatures fled."

So for a long time now, I've been interested in retellings of the Genesis creation story, which of course isn't just a story. It's also one of the main places in the history of Judaism and Christianity where questions about what it means to be human get worked out, and especially what it means to be embodied human beings. Sexed, gendered, desiring. There are actually two stories of human creation in Genesis, and they don't fit together that easily or naturally. But nonetheless, historically, they've often been harmonized to prop up notions of gender complementary, natural law, and divinely ordained patriarchy, that is. Theological arguments that have been used to terrorize LGBTQ persons of faith. And so what I love about the passage I just read is how it leans into the tensions of the Genesis text, tensions that are undeniably there. And yet at the same time, it flips the script.

The Untitled Treatise acknowledges the normative and masculinist pretensions to mastery, to a totalizing stability, to gender, to an anthropological account that seeks to be and to explain everything within an utterly coherent and fully closed system. And it even shows how those pretensions are grounded in the scriptural text. And yet it also tells the story otherwise. Eve does not in fact come from Adam's rib here. Rather, this luminous woman has her own distinctive connection to the divine light. Here are the possibilities for embodied sexual difference multiply rather than contract. The story of the rib is a ruse. To put it bluntly, it's a lie. It's a ruse that does something. The text presents it as an attempt to shore up a hetero patriarchal normative order, yet one that is ultimately on this telling, just simply untrue. And so for those of us who find that we inhabit our gender and/or our desire in complicated ways, ways that do not fit neatly into the demands of the norms we are always already thrown into, there are possibilities here, and ones I would argue that are not in fact actually new.

Ethicist Judith Butler writes quite movingly. "It is not a question merely of producing a new future for genders that do not yet exist. The genders I have in mind have been existing for a long time, a gender complexity that we have always been living. Because the norms governing reality have not admitted these forms to be real, we will of necessity call them new. But I hope we will laugh knowingly, when and if we do. In the Untitled Treatise, Eve's embodied difference poses an analogous challenge, one that the authorities in the story can only respond to with attempted sexual violence. Yet crucially, even here they fail. "And Eve, being a force, laughed at their decision."

Cheyenne Boon:

Please rise in body or spirit, and join me in prayer. God of stories, thank you for the telling and retelling of the stories that make us who we are. Today you told us that Eve was a force. Help us to be a force in this world. A force for good, and for justice, and for compassion, and for gentleness. Help us to be the force that makes everyone's story her. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Cheyenne Boon:

And now if you'll 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 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 hymn number 313. "Lord, Make Us Servants of Your Peace."

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.

Congregation:

Amen.