

Courtney Godwin:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Courtney Godwin:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. Our speaker this morning is Frances Lee, who is a second year Indiv, small correction from the bulletin this week, and for all who are able, will you please stand and join me in Psalm 84, found on page 42 of the black psalter.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O lord of hosts.

Congregation:

My soul longs, indeed faints for the courts of the Lord, my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

Courtney Godwin:

Even a sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God.

Congregation:

Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.

Courtney Godwin:

Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

Congregation:

As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.

Courtney Godwin:

Behold our shield, O God, look on the face of your anointed.

Congregation:

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.

Courtney Godwin:

For the Lord, God is a sun and shield, he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Congregation:

O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

Courtney Godwin:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing)

Frances Lee:

Excerpt from Litanies to My Heavenly Brown Body, by Mark Aguhar.

"Blessed are the sissies. Blessed are the boi dykes. Blessed are the people of color my beloved kith and kin. Blessed are the trans. Blessed are the high femmes. Blessed are the sex workers. Blessed are the disabled. Blessed are the hot fat girls. Blessed are the weirdo queers. Blessed is the spectrum. Blessed is consent. Blessed is respect. And blessed are the beloved who I didn't describe, I couldn't describe, will learn to describe and respect and love." Amen.

And as a queer trans Chinese person, I don't see people like me represented in leadership roles. But I decided to apply to Harvard Divinity School because for years, my friends, my chosen family, mostly queer people of color, told me they longed for spiritual communities led by one of their own.

After I got here, I felt pressured to explore the many requirements of ministerial ordination. I was told that it would probably be difficult for me to be recognized as a spiritual leader and access resources if I didn't have institutional credentials. I realized I could spend my entire life seeking out the approval of those in power before making a single move. Do I really need permission to build what I know my communities need and don't have?

Today's reading was written by trans feminine Philippinex artist, Mark Aguhar. Mark made art that celebrated being queer, trans, fat, femme, and brown, in the face of harassment. Tragically, Mark died by suicide in 2012, at the age of 25, but the work continues to be a political intervention in locating beauty and wisdom in what the world deems ugly and of no use.

To me, queerness isn't about a non-normative sexual or gender identity. Queerness is a set of tools gained from perspective of being an outsider, by being shamed for your desires, by being shut out from places of worship, and family, and resource. Queerness creates beauty out of refuse. Queerness offers a covenantal bond that is stronger than blood or dogma. And queerness dares to hope, even when hope is disallowed.

As queer and trans people of color, we're not holding our collective breath to be let back into religious spaces. We're not waiting for theologians to come up with enough reinterpretations of sacred texts that affirm what we already know to be true about ourselves. We are your sages, your prophets, your healers, your ritual leaders, your spiritual caretakers. Some of you forget that we are already divine. The forgetting happened when European Christian colonizers violently imposed the version of hetero patriarchy and the gender binary on indigenous peoples and the rest of the colonized world. I mean, just right now, there's a record number of anti LGBTQ bills proposed this year, many of which target trans and non-binary youth, and largely due to lobbying by the Christian right.

Recently, I attended a Buddhist Christian meditation retreat in Western Mass for people of color. During a discussion in the Dharma Hall, I couldn't help but share my vision to create a spiritual center for queer and trans people of color. Okay, so picture this, a huge light filled wooden yurt next to a babbling brook. It's got solar panels, backup generators, and emergency supplies for extreme climate. It's a place to gather to recite poetry, cook sumptuous meals from the garden, weep for those we've lost, dance with abandon, rest, and be in relationship with the land and its original stewards.

I was ready for pushback, maybe even laughter, at my audacity to want so much, to want this much for my community. But my teacher, a black womanist, told me something no person of faith has ever told me before. She looked straight at me and said, "Frances, your voice is God's voice." I was shaken. But I can inhabit the God given authority that defies religious permission and societal expectation, because there, the possibilities are endless, and what the world needs is endless possibility. I invite all of you to support me, and others like me, in becoming spiritual leaders who create necessary refuge and craft more livable futures.

Courtney Godwin:

Will you pray with me? Eternal God, in whom we move, and live, and breathe, and have our being, accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

Will you please rise, in body or spirit, to recite the prayer that Jesus taught us.

Congregation:

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.

Courtney Godwin:

Let us now sing the hymn number 278, God is my Strong Salvation.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

God of justice, you have called us to create, and to be the spaces that our communities need. Remind us that we are your divine beings, and that there are infinite possibilities for those spaces to become real world. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.