

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 Psalm 23, found on page 12. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters."

Congregation:

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters."

Cheyenne Boon:

"He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in straight paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Congregation:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Cheyenne Boon:

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Congregation:

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Choir:

(singing)

Ellen K. Williams:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Ellen K. Williams:

Thank you to the choir. That music is always so amazing. Psalm 118 verse 24. "This is the day that the Lord hath made. Let us be glad and rejoice in it." I run a small charity that works in the Kisoro district of Uganda. As one of our projects, we pay scholarship fees and living expenses for 75 girls, most of whom attend a local boarding school. They live in dormitory rooms with a hundred girls in a room about half the size of this chapel. They have 10 shower stalls shared among 520 girls where they can use a bucket of water to take a sponge bath. They use a single bar of soap to clean their clothes, their bodies, their hair. Most of us would not consider this the lap of luxury. Yet, on one of my last visits there, one of the girls said that the girls we sponsor collectively call themselves the golden girls because they are so blessed to have everything they need to study so that they're not a burden to their parents.

One girl asked if I could visit her home. When I asked if she wanted me to meet her family, she said no. She wanted to show me where she had slept on the floor for the first 14 years of her life so that I would understand how much she appreciated the mattress we had bought her for her dorm. Every time I go to Kisoro, I am struck by how virtually everyone is walking a tight rope with no safety net below. Living their lives one stroke of bad luck away from financial ruin, disaster or tragedy. Whether that bad luck comes in the form of an illness, an accident, or a job loss. People in Uganda die every day from illnesses or accidents that could be successfully treated in any American city.

Despite this backdrop of hardship and uncertainty, many of the people I know are overwhelmingly joyful, overwhelmingly grateful, and astoundingly optimistic. They are in fact being glad and rejoicing. Of course, there are hardships that cause considerable sadness, but there is a palpable joy in the way that people approach everyday life. I meet people every day who are overjoyed at having every meal, every day of not being ill, every safe journey completed, blessings that I in fact share but frequently overlook. Somehow many people seem to approach this nearly constant hardship and the threat of impending tragedy, not by dwelling on it, but instead by rejoicing in whatever positive thing the current moment is bringing.

Why does this happen there? The easy answer would be to say that having so little makes people more grateful for what they receive. Another answer would be to say that people are buoyed up by their powerful Christian faith. While both things may be true, I think there is something more. What I experience in Kisoro is that the people I know have developed a discipline of gratitude that has become a habit causing people to stop multiple times a day and assess what gift they have just been given. This gratitude is voiced directly and repeatedly, gratitude for a meal, gratitude for a child, gratitude for their job. People repeatedly say to me, thank you for loving us.

It seems to be this discipline of stopping to name the gratitude that makes all the difference. It is not accounting of your blessings at the end of the day, or thinking of three things you were grateful for. Both those strategies may be helpful too. Rather, it is an approach to daily life that is all about breaking life's moments down into gifts and being willing to explicitly name them to yourself and to each other. I wish I could say that seeing all this gratitude and joy makes it easy for me to live that same way. It hasn't. I still grumble. I still get anxious over minor issues, and I still dwell on things that are a nuisance and not a tragedy. It has, however, made me 100% convinced of the benefit of trying to live that way, of trying to take this one day and be glad and rejoice in it. And for that lesson and for the friends in Uganda who have taught it to me, I'm very, very grateful.

Cheyenne Boon:

Please rise, in body or spirit and join me in prayer. Gracious God, we praise you this day and always for all the gifts of your creation. We lift up our prayer of thanksgiving for each and all of our lives, for

everything in the past that brought us here and for the promise of a future as yet unseen. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Cheyenne Boon:

Now, please join in saying the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be they 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 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 art in heaven, hallowed be they 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 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 the hymn. This Is My Song, O God of All the Nations, hymn number 20.

Congregation/Choir:
(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.