

Courtney Godwin:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Courtney Godwin:

Welcome to Morning Prayers, the first one of this new spring semester. For all who are able, will you please rise and join me for our responsive reading? Psalm number 113 found in your black saltar.

Hallelujah. Oh, servants of the Lord give praise. Praise the name of the Lord.

Congregation:

Let the name of the Lord be blessed now and forever.

Courtney Godwin:

From east to west, the name of the Lord is praised.

Congregation:

The Lord is exalted above all nations. His glory is above the heavens.

Courtney Godwin:

Who is like the Lord our God, who enthroned on high?

Congregation:

See's what is below on Heaven and on Earth.

Courtney Godwin:

He raises the poor from the dust, lifts up the needy from the refuse heap.

Congregation:

To set them with the great,[inaudible with the great men of his people.

Courtney Godwin:

He sets the childless woman among her household as a happy mother of children. Hallelujah. You may be seated.

Jenny Hoffman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Morning.

Jenny Hoffman:

A reading from Paul's letter to the Galatians, chapter six, beginning at the second verse.

"Carry each other's burdens and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they're someone when they're not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone without comparing themselves to someone else. For each one should carry their own load."

So, let me repeat the first and last words of Paul's passage. Carry each other's burdens, but each one should carry their own load. I will return to this, but let me start by saying Happy New Year.

Congregation:

Happy New Year.

Jenny Hoffman:

Thank you. Today is the first day of the spring semester, A day when many in our community have just returned from travels all over the world, perhaps from cherished time with family, from warmer weather, and from unstructured days of extra sleep, sport, or other hobbies. And now the academic rhythm begins again. Friends, are you ready?

I am not. I've been at Harvard for 20 years and here's how my typical winter break goes. By the end of the fall semester, I'm hanging on for dear life with zero white space on my calendar, multiple student paper drafts on my desk, and hundreds of urgent emails in my inbox. By the skin of my teeth, I turn in my fall grades only a day or two late, and I scramble to coordinate the faculty reading of 1,000 newly submitted graduate applications. And then I collapse. I flee the scene, consume an alarming amount of popcorn, and do jigsaw puzzles with my family.

But within a few days, I gradually emerge from my stupor and worked my way through the emails that are weighing on me. Finally, with a feeling of closure, I enthusiastically write down my goals and map out my time for the year ahead.

But this winter was different. Following three years of isolation, masking, and immune system atrophy, I spent this break trying out every germ in the Cambridge Public School system. Instead of completing puzzles, I was sneezing the pieces off the table. Instead of cleaning out my inbox, I cleaned and gave spa treatment to my daughter's beloved stuffed owl, who was chewed up by an exuberant dog.

For over a month, I was not 100% sick, but also not 100% well. I never closed 2022 or wrote my 2023 goals. But perhaps my malaise was as much emotional burnout as physical illness. I had intended to be on sabbatical in Fall 2022. For years, I had dreamed about running across this beautiful country.

For my 2019 sabbatical, I bought a one-way ticket to San Francisco and ran 2,500 miles towards New York before I took a misstep on day 42 and ended up a sobbing puddle on a roadside in Cleveland unable to stand. After knee surgery and long rehab. I bought another one-way ticket for September 2022. I trained up to 200 miles a week through the 90 degree heat of the summer.

But in late August, a torn hamstring forced another last minute deferral of my long held dream. Again, I cried, regrouped, and focused on the anticipated consolation prize, a semester of productive time with my research students, freed from my classroom teaching responsibilities. But despite the teaching relief, I bit off more than I could chew.

My official job description includes teaching, research, fundraising, publishing, advising, and serving on committees. But I'm fully aware of the privilege and luck that has brought me to Harvard. So, I try to repay my good fortune by mentoring, organizing, encouraging, and helping in this academic community

wherever I see a need. Yet, as I entered last week and counted down on one hand the number of days before the rigorous spring schedule, I was still staring down 100 urgent emails from last year.

I was hurdling out of control towards two unprepared courses to teach, 15 weeks of back-to-back meetings, cascading deadlines and unresolved commitments to students, colleagues, and collaborators alike.

Paul wrote, "Carry each other's burdens but each one should carry their own load." I was utterly failing to carry the community burdens I had volunteered for, let alone my own standard teaching and administrative load. When a staff colleague in the Seas coffee room last week, politely asked, "How are you?" The floodgates opened. He kindly took a timeout and walked with me for 20 minutes as I unloaded.

Though he couldn't respond to my emails for me or cross items off my to-do list, his gift of reflective listening unburdened some of my task paralysis, and gave me the energy I needed to initiate more conversations. Through the week, I met with my co-instructor, committee members, colleagues, and senior students in my lab.

I asked for help and they gave it without hesitation. And I'm grateful to many of you in this room here. But how can I reconcile my meltdown with Paul's exhortation to carry each other's burdens, but each one should carry their own load? I spent some time reading for wisdom and with apologies to anybody here who is native Greek or Latin speaker, the Greek word Paul used for load was *fortono* used to describe a marching soldier's pack, I.E., a load designed to be carried by one person. But when Paul wrote of carrying each other's burdens, he used the Greek word *βαρύς* meaning something extremely heavy, too crushing to be born alone.

But the challenge in our daily lives, especially in this community of idealistic overachievers, is to know the difference. A few verses later, Paul continues, "Let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time, we will reap the harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people."

Yes. When our own loads become too heavy, we do become weary and lose the opportunity to carry other burdens. I still have no detailed time map for 2023, but I do have one new goal, to be more thoughtful about which loads I shoulder and also more observant of who is overburdened around me.

I aim to ask, "How are you?" And commit to listening. As I discovered talking can be far more helpful than putting yet another email response in somebody else's inbox.

Will you pray with me? God, please grant us the strength to carry our loads, but also the wisdom to recognize in ourselves and those around us when loads become burdens. Grant us the courage to reach out for help and the awareness to offer help when we have the capacity.

Congregation:

Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

Please rise in body or Spirit for the Lord's prayer.

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

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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:

Please join in singing the hymn, "We Gather Together to Ask the Lord's Blessing." Hymn number 27, found in your crimson Harvard Bible.

As we enter this new exciting semester, let us not take on too many loads. Let us share our burdens with one another and rest in the love of the Lord and the community that surrounds us. Amen.