

Courtney Godwin:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Courtney Godwin:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. For all who are able, please rise and join me in our responsive reading.
Psalm number 50, found in your black psalter.

Hallelujah. Praise God in the holy temple. Praise God in the firmament of power.

Congregation:

Praise God for every almighty act. Praise God's excellent greatness.

Courtney Godwin:

Praise God with the blast of the ram's horn. Praise God with the lyre and harp.

Congregation:

Praise God with the timbrel and dance: praise God with stringed instruments and the pipe.

Courtney Godwin:

Praise God with resounding cymbals. Praise God with loud exclaiming cymbals.

Congregation:

Let everything that has breath praise God. Hallelujah.

Courtney Godwin:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing)

Chris Ong:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Chris Ong:

This morning's inspired text comes from Friedrich Nietzsche's book, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, where he writes that, "The end of a melody is not its goal." This thought ricocheted in my head as I stood in the Memorial room on December 13th, realizing it was my last time singing the Christmas carol

service with the university choir. It was a novel feeling. I was so used to being able to think that there will always be next year. And thinking about the future, and knowing that it existed, was comforting. And so, the realization that, in a few hours there would be no more carols ever felt like a gut punch.

As a culture, we're pretty bad at talking about endings. We say things like, every end is a new beginning, which seeks to dismiss our feelings of melancholy by focusing on something better. As college students, we're used to constant upward trajectories, the expectation that everything we do will one day be superseded by something better in the future. That's how it's been our whole lives. Everything meaningful that we once did in high school, there's probably a better version here. And stuck in this mindset, it was hard for me to accept that this year will probably be the high point of music in my life, and that terrified me.

There are a lot of thoughts that go through a person's head when they come to a realization like this. And as the carols played, I tried to lay down tracks, where the road that was about to end right in front of me. I thought to myself that there would be other choirs, or I could come back as an alum, or even as a grad student, and sing again. But I soon realized that, although each of those ideas might approximate what the present felt like, I would never again be able to recreate the feeling of singing music at such a high level at this place that I've come to call home, and surrounded by these people who have become like a family to me.

And so the question looms, how will I ever be satisfied with only a memory of this time in my life? And the answer to that question came from an unexpected place, and it's really best described in the story. So here goes.

Two music lovers go to a symphony, and for an hour and 59 minutes, it's perfect from end to end. But in the last minute, a bunch of instruments play out of tune, and the audience groans. And as they walk out, one audience member says to another, "The ending ruined the whole thing for me."

I like this story, because it's relatable and it's illustrative. And at the same time, it really doesn't make sense. Because for the first hour and 59 minutes, there's no way anyone in the audience could have known that was coming. And so, their experience of most of the symphony was totally unblemished, even if their memory of the whole thing was soured by the ending. And the fact that that's not what anyone really cares about, shows how in the grand scheme of things, we really value our memory of our life experiences more so than how we felt in the moment. And so in a sense, living in the moment, or prolonging the moment, is less important than living to create a memory.

We ought to live our lives as if we're constructing a story, one that we will look back on fondly. And in that moment, I realized, that all of my experiences of senior year were special precisely because they were final. Watching friends, who I had known since freshman year, take the stage together as leads in The Merry Widow felt special, precisely because it was the culmination of four years of music and friendship. And this march when I sing in Sanders Theater with the Harvard Krokodiloes for the last time, it will feel special because of its finality, not in spite of it. Endings aren't just necessary. They can also be beautiful.

When I read this morning's inspired text, I actually left out quite a bit. The full text reads, that quote, "The end of a melody is not its goal; but nonetheless, had the melody had not reached its end it would not have reached its goal either."

So to my fellow members of the class of 2023, and especially to my seniors and the Ferris Choral Fellows, we are approaching our end together, but we have certainly found our goal.

Courtney Godwin:

Let us pray. Eternal God, in whom we move 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:

All who are able, please rise. Together, let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying...

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, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

And now, let lift our voices together in song. Today we are singing the hymn number 277, All My Hope on God is Founded.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

Courtney Godwin:

Dear Lord, as we leave this place today, help us to keep in mind that the end of a melody is not its goal. Help us to live our lives as if we are constructing them as a story, as a memory that we'll one day look back and smile upon, and that you might smile upon now. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.