

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to morning prayers and happy Valentine's Day. Please rise as you're able, and join me in our responsive psalm, number 67 in your black psalter. May God be gracious to us and bless us, and make his face to shine upon us.

Congregation:

That thy way be known upon earth, thy saving power among all nations.

Elizabeth Propst:

Let the peoples praise thee, oh God. Let all the peoples praise thee.

Congregation:

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for thou must judge peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth.

Elizabeth Propst:

Let the peoples praise thee, oh God. Let all the peoples praise thee.

Congregation:

The earth has yielded its increase. God, our God, has blessed us.

Elizabeth Propst:

God has blessed us. Let all the ends of the earth fear him.

Choir:

(singing)

Emmanuel K. Akyeampong:

Good morning again.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Emmanuel K. Akyeampong:

I take my text from the Book of Esther, chapter six, verses 1 through 4. That night, the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles, and they were read before the king. And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the door keepers, who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. Then the king said,

what honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this? And the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." So the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now, Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallies that he had prepared for him. Here ends our reading.

I've entitled my reflections God's Provision. I like how the scripture for this morning starts. That night, the king could not sleep. And thus began the reversal of the plot of Haman to obliterate the Jews in the empire of Persia. Out of a dark night, a remembrance brought light and salvation for the Jews. God sees ahead and makes provision for us.

We are in Black History month and I'm reminded of the special relations that existed between the first head of state of the country of Ghana, my native country in West Africa, Kwame Nkrumah and African Americans from this country in the 1950s and 1960s. Nkrumah had attended Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and also the University of Pennsylvania between 1935 and 1945. And while there, he made visits to New York where he had met African American intellectuals like W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James. African Americans were strongly represented at Ghana's independence ceremonies in March 1957. Indeed, Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott King both attended Ghana's independence ceremonies. It is in Accra that Martin Luther King met Vice President Richard Nixon for the first time, who assumed King was Ghanaian and congratulated him for his country's independence.

Nkrumah would invite African Americans, then caught in a bitter civil rights struggle, to relocate to Ghana and assist in the building of the first independent Black African nation. Martin Luther King was deeply impacted by his trip to Ghana that the first ceremony he preached on his return to Alabama on April 7th, 1957 was entitled The Birth of a New Nation. King encouraged African Americans to go and lend their technical assistance to the building of Ghana. The exodus would include luminaries like Du Bois, who assumed Ghanaian citizenship at the end of his life, and died in Ghana in 1963, where he's buried at the Du Bois Memorial Center.

Three decades later, I would be a beneficiary of these historic relations as I came to graduate school in the United States. I recall a summer in 1988 as a student in Wake Forest University in North Carolina walking up the stairs to Reynolda Hall. I heard a sharp, "Pss." That is a very Ghanaian way of calling someone. Was I imagining things? I continued to climb the stairs, and that "Pss" came again, even more insistent. I looked behind to see a tall African American woman. I walked towards her. "Seeing your shirt, I was transported back to the University of Ghana in the 1960s," she said. I was wearing a Ghanaian print shirt. And that is how I met and became a friend to Maya Angelou, who had been part of the African American community in Ghana.

In 1993, I joined Harvard as an assistant professor. Like Wake Forest, I knew no one in Cambridge when I arrived. Another African American who had been part of the African American community in Ghana in the 1960s reached out to me, the Harvard political scientist, Martin Kilson. He and his wife, Mary, had lived in Ghana under Nkrumah, and would invite me over. And so began another friendship. I am struck by how the Lord makes provision for me as a lonely student, foreign student in Wake Forest and as a lonely assistant professor at Harvard through the historic ties between African Americans and Ghana in the 1960s. I muse that today I sit on the board of the W.E.B. Du Bois Museum Foundation, which seeks to rehabilitate the Du Bois Memorial Center in Accra. I guess it's time for me to pay it back. The Lord indeed sees ahead and makes provision. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Emmanuel K. Akyeampong:

Let us pray. The psalmist in Psalm 121 states, "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. Let us depart from this place assured that the Lord remembers us and makes provision for us." Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please rise in body or spirit for the Lord's Prayer.

All:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as 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.

Elizabeth Propst:

And please join in our closing hymn, Love is Kind and Suffers Long, number 331.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

Christ has no hands in this world but your hands, and no voice in this world but your voice. So let our hands and our voices do the work of justice and of love today and all days. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.