

Theresa Lungu:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Theresa Lungu:

And welcome to morning prayers. Our speaker today is Reverend Kevin Ross. He's a third year Harvard Divinity School student. Please rise as you're able and join me in the responsive reading number 84 from the black psalter book. How lovely is your dwelling place, oh Lord of Hosts.

Congregation:

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

Theresa Lungu:

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

Congregation:

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

Theresa Lungu:

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.

Theresa Lungu:

Behold our shield, oh 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.

Theresa Lungu:

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:

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

Choir:

(singing)

Kevin Ross:

Good morning, Harvard.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Kevin Ross:

How good it is to be with you on this dewy and misty spring-like day in the dead of winter here in the great Appleton Chapel in the Memorial Church at the heart of campus for yet another morning prayer service. I'm Kevin Ross. I am a student in the Master of Religion and Public Life program here at Harvard. Everybody calls me Rev Kev, and so can you. If you're here this early on any given day to hear anything that I may have to say, you must be a friend of mine. And if not, I hope that you will be by the time I am finished speaking.

I'm back here today because I am due to graduate this May, and being in a prayer service could give me a little extra help. And so asking you to keep me in your prayers this morning. My subject today is drawn from John the 10th chapter, the 16th verse. It reads thusly. "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep fold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." Today I will speak briefly, but urgently on the topic herding other sheep. Herding other sheep.

"I am one with God. I am one with all people. I am one with all life." For the first 18 years of my life, growing up in a little-known Unity church headed by an African American woman with an unusual name for a woman, Johnnie Colemon, we would affirm these words every Sunday. For 18 years, I said those words every Sunday. You want to try them on with me? If so, repeat them after me. I am one with God.

Congregation:

I am one with God.

Kevin Ross:

I am one with all people.

Congregation:

I am one with all people.

Kevin Ross:

I am one with all life.

Congregation:

I am one with all life.

Kevin Ross:

And on that same South Side of Chicago on Forest Avenue, my childhood home was sandwiched between a Pentecostal church on one end of the block and a Sunni Muslim [foreign language 00:11:22] on the other end of the block. And next door to me lived our nosy neighbor, Mrs. Eula May Crumb. Yes. She was a cafeteria worker who perked herself in her second-floor window that overlooked the entire block. And she made it her business to watch over and report on everybody's children. What did she do? She watched over, and what, reported on everybody's children, including yours truly, more than I would appreciate. She was known to everyone in the community as Big Eula. And if you lived on Forest Avenue and you were a child, you belonged to her. You belonged to her if you were white or black and spoke English you belonged to her if you were Mexican and spoke Spanish/ you belong to her if you were from the Middle East and you spoke Arabic. No child on our block could escape her gaze or were exempt from her reporting, even the so-called other sheep.

And from these two great matriarchal figures in my life, a seed was planted that bloomed in the way that I see the world. I learned to love and to appreciate my black chocolate self because I was loved and beloved by the sheep who were of my fold, my culture, my community, and my block. But I also learned another very valuable lesson that my love for my own sheep, people of African descent, was not the ending point, but the starting point in my journey toward becoming fully human. Let me repeat that really quickly. I learned that my love for my own sheep, people of African descent, was not the ending point, but the starting point in my journey toward becoming fully human.

I learned, at my undergraduate alma mater Morehouse College, the words of Dr. King who said, and I quote, "We have inherited a big house, a great world house in which we have to live together, black and white, Easterners and Westerners, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics, Protestant, Muslim, and Hindu. A family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who because we can never again live without each other, must learn somehow in this one big world to live with each other." And because of this, my fascination with culture and color, language and luggage exploded. And I have been herding other sheep ever since.

I have learned to live, work, worship, sleep, eat, and travel with other sheep. And I've learned that if you have not traveled the world yet, you might still believe that your mother's cooking is the best. That means some of us have yet to travel. Don't tell my mama. Ultimately, these seeds grew in me and I have learned to extend my branches over many fences. I've learned that in order for us to step fully into our humanity, we must become more like Big Eula. We must become nosy neighbors and her other sheep. We must broaden our neighborhood of concern until the love in our hearts spills over the banks and sends our care and concern to people who don't look like us, cook like us, dress like us, dance like us, walk like us, or talk like us. When we forge this courageous curiosity and unconscious, uncautious concern, we will be granted access to the mystical corridor that the saints, the sages, the mystics, and the masters throughout the ages have known. If we go down deeply enough in ourselves, we will come up in everybody else.

And thus we don't have to be from the Ukraine to feel the deep loss that a mother feels whose family was destroyed in a war-torn country. We don't have to be from Haiti to celebrate with a family who got the news of the child's college acceptance to a place like Harvard. We don't have to be from Asia to feel the weariness of our sister who can't seem to shake her grief after two mass shootings in northern California that took the lives of people of Asian descent. We simply have to go down deeply enough in ourselves, and we will what? Come up in everybody else. And so you'll understand this morning why my heart has been heavy herding other sheep from the Muslim world today, people who have literally witnessed the ground open up and swallow thousands of their family members and loved ones. It is for these other sheep this morning, our neighbors in Turkey, that I call us to prayer at this great Harvard

pulpit. Because somewhere, a man lost his life and was not able to rise and call that familiar [foreign language 00:17:40].

And so this morning, because along the way I have been granted access to the tables and to the temples and to the hearts, into the homes of beloveds in our Muslim community, in their stead, I wish to call us to prayer. I will issue this call in Arabic first and then translate in English. [foreign language 00:18:15]. And the words in English are thus: "God is the greatest. God is the greatest. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship but God. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship of God. I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God. I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God. Hasten to prayer, hasten to prayer, hasten to real success, hasten to real success. God is the greatest. God is the greatest. There's none worthy of worship but God."

And since we've now received this call to prayer, let us answer this long distance call and accept the charges from Turkey and our Muslim brothers and sisters as we stand and recite the ancient words from the master teacher, the Lord's Prayer. May we rise together.

All:

Our Father, which 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 that 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. Amen.

Theresa Lungu:

And please let us sing the hymn number 343 in your Harvard hymnal, Seek Not Afar for Beauty.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

As we go forth until this day, Lord, help us to see your blessings around us in the simple, small things that bring us joy every day. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.