

Courtney Godwin:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Courtney Godwin:

Welcome to Morning Prayers in Appleton Chapel. Will you please rise, embody your spirit, and join me in our opening Psalm, Psalm number 100 found in your black psalter.

May all lands be joyful before you, O God; serve you with gladness and come before your presence with a song.

Congregation:

For we know that you are God; you yourself have made us and we are yours; we are your people and the sheep of your pasture.

Courtney Godwin:

We shall enter your gates with thanksgiving, go into your courts with praise; give thanks to you and call upon your name.

Congregation:

For you are good; your mercy is everlasting; and your faithfulness endures from age to age.

Courtney Godwin:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing)

Saura Sahu:

Good morning, friends.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Saura Sahu:

In honor of Black History Month and given recent circumstances, I'll share a theme in this prayer with one of our saints who recently said, "Profound faith is compatible with rage."

Today, I'd like to read you some passages from a speech Malcolm X gave on a day, much like today, back in 1965, snowy and cold. His house had just been firebombed, and he showed up in Detroit at the Ford Theater to deliver these remarks just one week before he was assassinated on February 21st, 1965, 58 years ago today.

Now by this point, he was the post-racial, Pan-Africanist, humanist Malcolm, the loving Malcolm that we remember, and he was also lonesome. And that Malcolm said, "I don't believe in any form of racism, discrimination, and segregation. The yardstick used by the Muslim is not the person's color, but their deeds, their conscious behavior, their intentions. I've never advocated any violence. I've only said that black people who are the victims of organized violence, we should defend ourselves. This society doesn't hesitate to inflict the most brutal form of punishment and oppression upon dark-skinned people all over the world. But when it comes time for you and me to protect ourselves against lynchings, they tell us to be non-violent."

And then Malcolm recounts a scene that could have been taken from last week's headlines. I saw on the television where they took this black woman down in Selma, Alabama and knocked her down on the ground, dragging her down the street. It showed the sheriff and his henchman throwing this black woman on the ground. On the ground. They had their knees on her, holding her down, and full-grown black people standing around watching it, doing nothing about it, saying, "Well, let's overcome them with our capacity to love." What kind of phrase is that? Overcome them with our capacity to love. The only thing that power respects is power. Once we learn to talk the language that they understand, they will then get the point.

You've been in this country long enough to know the language the Klan speaks. They only know one language. What you and I have to start doing is start learning a new language, and then when they come up on our doorstep to talk, we can talk, and they will get the point. There'll be a dialogue, there'll be some communication, and I'm quite certain there will then be some understanding. So, I don't believe in violence. I want to stop it. We only mean vigorous action and self-defense. And that vigorous action, we feel we're justified in initiating by any means necessary. Here ends the lesson.

The title today is to protect and to serve in three short acts. Act one, three sons. There's a lot for anyone to love about Malcolm X, especially his capacity to grow and to change over a lifetime. But today, I'll celebrate something with all of us about him that never changed, his righteous anger and defense of the weak, and his defiant service of others, even onto death. Now, in this Malcolm followed at least two other sons of God. You've heard it said that Moses carried divine tablets commanding "You shall not murder." But in Exodus chapter two, it is also written, "One day after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. Now, that lesson still remains in the Bible for some reason.

You've also heard it said of Jesus, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Again, "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also." But it's also written that when entering Jerusalem, "Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple. And he overturned the tables of the money changers in the suits of those who sold doves." And here I hate the interpretations that show Jesus vindicating the poor against abuses through these kinds of actions. To hear John tell it, Jesus even fashioned a whip of chords in this process. It was a uniquely violent moment and a perfect life of peace. It occurred because zeal for God's house perfectly consumed a perfect Jesus. And remember, it's the children of God, not any building that is the holy temple for whom Jesus had zeal.

Now, nowhere do we actually see Malcolm or Moses or Jesus defending themselves, but we do see them defend others. So then what do you think these three sons of God might share? Act two, God is a mother. On earth, all three of these sons were mama's boys in a way. And I don't know if God is a man or a woman, I tend to believe that God is neither male nor female. But one thing's for certain for me, this I am sure, God is a mother.

Anyone who knows me knows that I like adventure, skydiving, motorcycles. So I was out riding a motorcycle around the Tennessee Hills one day. I was riding along having fun, hot sun, and then the traffic stopped and I sat there, of course, and I'm grumbling because I'm sitting in the sun. And all of a sudden I shut up because about a hundred feet in front of me, a full size mama bear and her full litter of cubs went stalking across the road. And as much as I like adventure, friends, I tell you I never wanted so much as to be inside that station wagon.

What's the most important law of the forest? Never, ever, ever come between a mama and her cubs. No matter how roughly bad an earthly mother might be, and we all know someone who might not have been the best, that mother nourished you in her belly, carried you before you were born, brought you forth through her pain and sacrifice, strengthened you when you were too small to do anything for yourself, went to your events after long work days, cheered you on through the tears of her broken dreams, shared your joys, comforted your sorrows. And when you succeed, no one will be prouder of you. And if anyone comes to hurt you, no one, no one will fight with more single-minded ferocity to protect you. Who stood by Jesus when he died? God is a mother.

Act three, honor your father and mother. The Hebrew Bible tells us to honor our fathers and mothers so that our days might be long. What is it to honor a father? I'm a father of three grown daughters, so I'll take a little license and sometimes we might ask, do some of us think that it's about submitting to our authority, obeying our rules, appreciating us, following in our trade? Does it often revolve around affirming something about our place in the world as fathers? I've met a lot of good Christian fathers like that. I've been that father, sometimes.

But what is it to honor your mother? What do great mothers want? Now, I don't know, and I'm sure that it's many things. But when push comes to shove, most of the great mothers who I know are usually happy, totally satisfied, if you just have some basic gratitude for how much weight they've borne for you, and if you protect their children.

Knowing with certainty that God is a mother, I like to believe there's a special place in our divine mother's heart for those who at great cost to themselves sacrifice and defend our siblings by any means necessary. Malcolm X is one of those people. And I believe and knowing some of you, I am uncertain that you're here today because you are too. We are people of peace, but we're also people who appreciate our mother's righteous anger over the sufferings of our siblings, and we are called upon to protect and to serve all of our mother's children.

If you would, while you remain seated, bow your heads with me and pray.

Dear Mother, today, may we go out once more with outstretched arms to fight for the oppressed, the stranger, and the outcasts. May we go to bring abundant peace wherever possible, but so that we might not always be mourning our newly dead and revisiting the same old prayers, let us not shrink back or be afraid to carry with us your righteous anger to defend the lowly by any means, and to protect the weak wherever necessary. We thank you for your grace. We thank you for your faithfulness. We thank you for carrying us all this long way. We pray only for the wisdom to discern your will and the strength to carry it out. And above all, we thank you again for your abundant love, which gives us an everlasting hope for the future. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

Please rise, in body or spirit in the Lord's prayer. Together we say the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying...

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

Please join in singing our hymn today, lift every voice and sing hymn number 277 in your Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:
(singing)

Courtney Godwin:

God, who is mother to us all, you call us into the world to protect, to defend, and to love one another as you do for us. Let us go into this day with your holy, righteous anger, and do your will. Amen.

Congregation:
Amen.