

Theresa Lungu:

Good morning.

Congregation:

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Theresa Lungu:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. Our speaker this morning is Jenn Louie. She's a master of religion and public life student at Harvard Divinity School. Please rise as you are able and join me in the responsive reading number 16 from the Black Appleton Psalter book.

"Preserve me O God, for in thee do I put my trust."

Congregation:

"O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord. Thou art my Lord. My goodness extendeth not to thee."

Theresa Lungu:

"But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight."

Congregation:

"Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god. Their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips."

Theresa Lungu:

"The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup. Thou maintainest my lot."

Congregation:

"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places. Yea, I have a goodly heritage."

Theresa Lungu:

"I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel. My reins also instruct me in the night seasons."

Congregation:

"I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

Theresa Lungu:

"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth. My flesh also shall rest in hope."

Congregation:

"For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

Choir:

(singing)

Jenn Louie:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Jenn Louie:

What a joy it is to see so many friendly faces. In our short time together, I'd like to speak from a theme entitled, Our Posture Towards the World and How We Care Matters. I share this quote with you from Maya Angelou. "We cannot change the past, but we can change our attitude toward it. Uproot guilt and plant forgiveness. Tear out arrogance and seed humility."

I'll share with you a story about myself and my father. My father is a gentle and soft-spoken man. However, our conversations are not particularly light or gentle, but they are deeply loving and often a bit confrontational. It was a cool day in the later months of 2020, the year that we went into lockdown and a lot of changed. And my father surprised me with a really big question that I think really held his concern and deep grief. He asked me, "Do you think people no longer fear God?"

We got into other questions and topics around Black Lives Matters protests, hate crimes against Asians and cancel culture, not supremely light topics. I had assumed he had a distaste for protests, and I also thought that he considered cancel culture undignified. But he really surprised me. He brought us back to his question about whether or not we no longer fear God.

He shared that maybe cancel culture is a necessary response to invoke fear into the fearless people in power, who believe they can hold their knee on the necks of others or attack elderly Asians in public, because they don't fear anything. Not other people, not the law, not even their chosen gods. And I could hear the grief in his voice. He wondered what happens to our world when people act as if they aren't accountable, when they're ultimately so fearless?

My father brought up that a healthy amount of fear is just that, really healthy. He learned as a doctor that pain is a necessary indicator in the body to keep one aware of ailments. There's a risk of too much. There's often also a risk of too little. A little fear might be like a little pain, an indicator that keeps us and our society consciously within healthy boundaries. He asked if this was the way that we shift people out of their posture of privilege, a posture that chooses to not hold reverence for one another. You see, according to my father, our posture in this world matters to one another.

In the same conversation, my father asked me about misinformation and why it was such a problem to fix. And I considered this question the lens of my previous work. I left Facebook earlier that year and I gave him this really increasingly complex answer about policies and systems and machine learning algorithms. And my father interrupted me and he shook his head at me, and I figured I had just lost him, because he just couldn't understand the complexities of my work. And he only read about social media in the news.

Instead, in his rarely used, very stern voice of admonishment, he said something to me along the lines of, "You know what your problem is? You and your Google and your Facebook peers dare to have the hubris to believe that you can solve the world's problems from afar. You don't know people's humanity. You don't feel their pain. You don't understand what people are going through, and you make people feel small like me for making things seem so complex. You need to stop doing that."

Again, I think what my father was teaching me was that the posture through which I am in service to this world, through my version of care, that matters too. Because my posture and the posture that we have to our work and our studies, it can also seem like a path towards violence.

My industry, the tech industry, well our posture, as my father pointed out, is full of hubris, especially in the ways that we show care. But hubris matched with care can be a dangerous combination. It lends itself to believing that our implementation of care can be another's protector and savior. Our ethics of care is limited by our posture of hubris. For this posture of hubris lends itself to enacting inequity and supremacy. And this posture pulls us from having genuine respect and reverence towards others.

We launch and iterate solutions with a certain type of fearlessness and privilege that increasingly lack sensitivity to what's healthy and what's human. And I, like so many other people in technology lean on the techniques of data analysis to give answers over being in proximity to people, and therefore neglecting the divine within them.

A quote from Cornel West reads, "You can't lead the people if you don't love the people. You can't save the people if you don't serve the people." So less than a year after this conversation, telling me I needed to learn humility and check my hubris and ego, I came here. I came to Harvard of all places. And you can imagine that my mom and dad are shaking their head at me to this day. But as I near graduation, I have been deeply reflecting upon the wisdom of my father very acutely, for my work here aspires to shift both my own posture and the tech industry's posture towards the world and act as a means of shifting how all of us posture ourselves to the often assumed authority of technology that increasingly has a larger and larger hold in our lives.

Taking a class on peace or justice does not matter, if it fundamentally does not shift our posture towards each other and the world. My hope is that before we try to solve the world's problems, we pause and ask ourselves about our posture towards the world. Before we implement and express our version of care, let us ask if it comes truly from a position of equality and reverence, or if we carry a posture of supremacy that claims that we somehow know better. And I ask this, because I worry that without being mindful of it, we will continue to risk perpetuating the injustice, the inequity and the systems of violence that we claim we want to treat and fix in the name of peace.

Tech, like all of us can carry and incubate and amplify the unhealed social ills created by supremacy and inequality through the ways that we care. But I do not believe that we are destined to repeat our violent histories. And this is my hope for moral innovation, that it paves a path for us to cultivate reverence towards one another, and fundamentally shift the posture with which we build our technologies and live into the ways that we all express care.

Theresa Lungu:

Please rise as you are able and let us pray. Thank You Lord for all Your goodness toward us all. We pray that Your presence be felt in our lives today. We give You all our cares and burdens, and we trust that You will take care of us. Amen.

Together let us recite the Lord's Prayer 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.

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

Theresa Lungu:

Please let us sing the hymn, What Wondrous Love Is This, number 221 in the Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing).

Theresa Lungu:

As we go forth into this day, let us rejoice in the privilege of being able to share in this time together, time to reflect and to breathe in the wonder of God's love. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.