

Courtney Godwin:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Courtney Godwin:

Welcome to Morning Prayers in Appleton Chapel. All who are able, please rise for our responsive reading, Psalm 100, found in your black psalter.

May all lands be joyful before You, oh, 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)

Jessica Fiorillo:

Good morning, everyone. I'm Jessica Fiorillo. Happy first day of Spring, everyone. Welcome back from spring break. Spring is all about new beginnings, so I thought I would tell you a little bit about my own new beginning and cycle of life's story.

Church and religion in general were notably absent from my childhood and from my adulthood, which makes the fact that I'm standing here today a complete surprise to me, so I thought I would tell you how I got here.

I moved to Cambridge last June, just nine months ago, to join the Harvard Graduate School of Education as executive director of the Harvard Education Press. Coming here was a homecoming of sorts for me. I spent the last 25 years living in Texas in a small rural town south of Dallas, but I grew up in Connecticut. I'm a New Englander at heart. My grandparents lived in here in Cambridge, and I came here often with my family to visit them.

My parents were married right here in Appleton Chapel on a September afternoon in 1963. On their anniversary, I was walking across Harvard Yard on my way to work. It was about 8:30 in the morning

and, as I passed by Memorial Church, I thought, "Maybe I'll just take a quick selfie in front of the church and send it to them on their anniversary," so I did, and then I thought, "I wonder if the doors are open and I could sneak in and take a picture of the inside for them," so I went to the big, blue doors and I pried the handle and, lo and behold, the doors opened and, when I walked in, the choir was singing.

You all were singing, and you moved me so much, the power of music, right? I slid into a pew so I could stay and listen, and the music literally shook me physically. You know that feeling where you feel the reverberations of music in the bones in your skull and you feel the organ making your ribs thrum? That's what I felt, and so I kept coming back. I came back for the music to crack me open, but also for the words I was hearing here.

For 25 years, I'd lived in a place where the church was really carefully, strategically, surgically dividing communities, sowing discontent and creating groups of other. Here, here was this message that everyone is welcome no matter who you are, no matter where you are, no matter who you love or what you believe, and that message was a salve to my soul. Every time I hear that, I choke up a little bit and I feel this deep sense of gratitude.

Being here in Cambridge represents this whole new chapter in my life. My husband and I have sent our daughter out into the world. We've left Texas behind. I have a job here that I love, a job that's about books and knowledge and sharing knowledge dedicated to the mission of improving lives of all people through education, but especially underrepresented people. It's a new chapter for me, a new day, but I'm also chasing the shadows of my family history.

My grandparents are buried here. My parents were married here. I walk across campus, and I feel those ties of history, but being here in this chapel lets me sit with both my own and our collective pasts and contemplate what the futures might be. This place, this church, holds space for me, and within these walls I feel opened up and emptied out and ready for the new. When I come here, I find peace and connection and music to open me up. This place is my lux and my veritas, a place where I can find both, a little bit of light and a little bit of truth, so I'm going to leave you with a poem that I love that sort of fits in. It's by Stuart Kestenbaum, and this is just an excerpt from his poem called Holding the Light.

"Make a place where the day speaks to the night and the earth speaks to the sky. Whether we created God or God created us, it all comes down to this. In our imperfect world, we are meant to repair and stitch together what beauty there is. Stitch it with compassion and wire. See how everything we have made gathers the light inside itself and overflows? A blessing."

Courtney Godwin:

Will you please rise in body or spirit for prayer?

Eternal God, in whom we move, breathe and have our being, accept, oh, 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:

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:

Please join in singing our congregational hymn, All My Hope on God is Founded, hymn number 277 in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

Courtney Godwin:

As we leave this place, may we repair and stitch together the beauty that is in this world so that we may be a little bit of light, just a little bit of God's light that overflows from within us. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.