

Theresa Lungu:

Good morning. Welcome to Morning Prayers at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker today is Dr. Liza Swedarsky. She's a clinical instructor at Harvard Medical School and founder and CEO of Health Vows LLC. Please rise as you are able and join me in the responsive reading number 118 from the black Psalter book.

Praise the Lord for He is good, His steadfast love is eternal.

Congregation:

Let Israel declare, "His steadfast love is eternal."

Theresa Lungu:

Let the house of Aaron declare, "His steadfast love is eternal."

Congregation:

Let those who fear the Lord declare, His steadfast love is eternal.

Theresa Lungu:

In distress, I called on the Lord. The Lord answered and it brought me relief.

Congregation:

The Lord is on my side. I have no fear. What can man do to me?

Theresa Lungu:

Open the gates of victory for me, that I may enter them and praise the Lord.

Congregation:

This is gateway to the Lord. The victorious shall enter through it.

Theresa Lungu:

I praise you, for you have answered me and have become my deliverance.

Congregation:

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

Theresa Lungu:

This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our sight.

Congregation:

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us exult and rejoice in it.

Choir:

(singing).

Liza M. Swedarsky:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Liza M. Swedarsky:

The reading from Matthew 11:28. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

I confess churches, chapels, and cathedrals feel more like home than my medical practice or the operating room. I also confess that I have known a weary heart. During this Lenten season I vowed to release it, give it up one last time. Weariness, this feeling, this energy synonymous with fatigue, exhaustion, tiredness, an inner reluctance to experience more of a thing. We wear it on the inside, alongside sometimes shame, avoidance, tolerance, self-judgment, perhaps anger, fear, or unforgiveness.

The first community health center in the United States was established here in Boston in 1965 with the goal of achieving health equity. Over the past 20 years, I've served in seven. Now more than 1,300 exist, caring for 28 million souls every year. Yet we are still struggling as a nation. One in three individuals seeking healthcare are unable to access timely appointments. Physicians are leaving the practice of medicine in unprecedented numbers. We all witnessed the intrusions of the patient-doctor relationship. Communities painted in black and brown, and those stricken by the perils of poverty are still challenged to find providers who see them or who look like them. Life circumstances, I know, directly correlate to health outcomes. Yet we wait, we treat, then we measure our successes or lack thereof over and over and over.

We have become focused on billing and payer reform rather than preventative care reform. And the burden I sometimes carry lives in the question, who will continue to choose to be a community health worker in times such as these? Weariness lives in the eyes. The eyes are the sky reflecting the state of the heart and are the barometer of the spirit. I see it in the eyes of my patients as I tune in wondering what burden are they carrying? I see in the gift of teachers who guide my children, it is reflected in the eyes of a beloved clergyman and also in those of my chaplain friend. I've witnessed it in the grief of mothers who have lost their sons and daughters to illness or gun violence. I have held it standing alongside a husband, losing his vibrant, yet dying wife who is not ready to go.

I call her Grace. Let's talk about her. See, I had moved to a state once who had different values. Grace was a prayer warrior. She brought everything to God, everything. She brought this golf-ball sized tumor that grew inside her over a year to be too large to measure to God when she was turned away from emergency rooms across the city because her Medicaid insurance were maxed.

When we met, she told me, "I had prayed to God for you. And when I called your office and heard your name, Liza, I knew that you were my surgeon." She called me to the hospital three months after I did her first surgery. I read journals to her children as she requested, while she decided how she would spend her remaining time here. In that moment, Grace made me wonder if weariness was contagious.

I wish I could say I played a role, that I played a part in saving her mortal life. Yet what she received were answers, clarity, comfort from a pained body and a path to peace and closure. During my stay in this state, I hit an all-time low. I was a misfit. I sat in my car almost every morning before office hours, praying to God for the divine right assignment. And when my job found me, intuitively I knew what to do. Yet I fought, worried myself. My decision would impact family, three other people. Another cross-

country move. Burdened in my attempts to overthink my intuitive voice, imagining that it may change to make everyone else comfortable, I tired and desired peace.

I set an intention one night. I went a block from my home and took an evening yoga class and I set myself up in the back and closed my eyes for the entire hour and I prayed to God. I asked for a sign, I asked for confirmation. And after the class, when I arrived home, it was close to 9:00 PM and my two-and-a-half-year old son, Marcus, he came running at me with a piece of paper. He said, "Mommy, mommy."

I said, "What are you doing awake?"

And he said, "While you were in class, I drew a picture for you." And as he held up this paper. And I said, "Well, tell me about it." He said, "I drew an angel watching you from this guy."

Jesus said, "I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure." I have never looked back. Even in the depths of my weariness, I know where to bring my burdens and where to bear my heart. I continue to stand as the hands of God and the heart of God surround me in service, approaching one divine life at a time. What God does for me, what God did for Grace, God will do for you.

Let weariness teach us to seek the light and maybe live in divine expectancy as we talk to God, our way will be made clear. During this Lenten season I'm asking each one here and each one listening beyond to focus on your heart and ask yourself these questions. What burdens me? What is the heavy load that I am carrying? What must I release?

In honor of my daughter, Zoe, and anyone and everyone, anywhere and everywhere who has ever known weariness, let us pray with open hearts, empathy, and compassion. Let us bow our heads, embodying these words by the late Debbie Ford, an author, of this poem, prayer and mantra, Drenched in Holiness.

Dear God, on this day, I ask you to grant this request. May I know who I am and what I am every moment of every day. May I be a catalyst for light and love and bring inspiration to those whose eyes I meet. May I have strength to stand tall in the face of conflict and the courage to speak my voice even when I'm scared. May I have the humility to follow my heart and the passion to live my soul's desires. May I seek to know the highest truth and dismiss the gravitational pull of my lower self. May I embrace and love the totality of myself, my darkness, as well as my light. May I be brave enough to hear my heart, to let it soften so that I may gracefully choose faith over fear. Today is my day to surrender anything that stands between the sacredness of my humanity and my divinity. May I be drenched in holiness and engulfed by your love. May all else melt away and so it is. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Theresa Lungu:

Thank you. Please rise as you're able and let us recite The Lord's Prayer. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us this day our daily 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.

And now let us join in the hymn, Great God, the Followers of Thy Son, number 261 in the crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing).

Theresa Lungu:

Thank you for joining us today at Morning Prayers, and as we leave Appleton Chapel this morning, may our hopes for a more peaceful and loving world be revived and restored. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.