

Theresa Lungu:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Theresa Lungu:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. Our speaker this morning is Anya Bassett. She's a Senior Lecturer and Director of Studies at the Harvard Committee on Degrees in Social Studies. And before we continue, just want to announce that we do have Morning Prayers on Monday, even though it's Marathon Monday. We're still open, so we hope to see you. Please rise as you're able, and join me in the responsive reading, number 67 from the black psalter book.

"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face to shine upon us."

Congregation:

"That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving power among all nations."

Theresa Lungu:

"Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the peoples praise thee."

Congregation:

"Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for thou dost judge the people with equity, and guide the nations upon earth."

Theresa Lungu:

"Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the peoples praise thee."

Congregation:

"The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us."

Theresa Lungu:

"God has blessed us. Let all the ends of the earth fear Him."

Choir:

(Singing).

Anya Bassett:

This morning's reading is from the Book of John 20:24-29. "Thomas was not with the disciples when Jesus came, so the disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.' A week later, the disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came in and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then He said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop

doubting, and believe." Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God." Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.""

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Congregation:

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Anya Bassett:

Every December, my husband and I read Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol out loud to each other. At the end of the book, Scrooge pledges to honor Christmas in his heart, and to try to keep it all the year. To me, the message of Christmas is primarily a message of love, a reminder to accept God's love and to share God's love, making humankind our business, and trying to bring some light into the darkness. I don't honor that pledge as much as I wish I did, but it's a pledge I can relate to.

This spring, I've been pondering what it would mean to honor Easter in our hearts, and to try to keep it all the year. For me, this is much harder, because Easter is primarily a message of faith, of believing something that, quite frankly, is hard to believe. I believe that God loves us so much that He sent His son to be born of a woman. I can see crucifixion in our world today, so it is not hard for me to believe that our sins are so great that Jesus died for us. But the idea that Jesus rose from the dead, became alive again for His disciples, and ascended into heaven? That's hard. If I'd been there in the first century, I would've wanted evidence, like Thomas.

Having faith is hard. I think it's particularly hard for those of us who spend a lot of our time in universities, with our understandable emphasis on analysis and reason and evidence. At Harvard, our motto is "Truth", not "Faith". And for many of us, including me, reason and analysis are not just a way of learning, they're a way of living. When I experience a problem, I try, in the delightful words of one of my colleagues, to have a think on it. I try to analyze it, try to understand it, try to fix it. But sometimes, we encounter problems that we can't think our way through.

I see this in my work with seniors, whose skills, like mine, are what got them to Harvard. Many arrive in senior year having outsmarted, and out-organized, and outworked any number of challenges, but the maps they have used don't work so well when it comes to senior year; writing a thesis, taking on a new leadership position, or, scariest of all, discerning what comes next after a lifetime of clear doors to walk through. While I typically don't talk about religion with my students, I find myself encouraging them to have faith, to believe that a door will open for them, even when they can't see the path forward.

Reason and analysis are also not much help when we experience suffering, terrible fear, and grief, and loss. They don't show us a way forward when the world feels engulfed in darkness and we can't see a light, to say nothing of being a light. In those times, for me, I have leaned into Christmas; the love of my family and friends who have cared for me and walked with me and my family. They have been a light when I couldn't see the path. But I have also needed to have faith to believe what I couldn't see. As my faith has grown, I've learned to accept that there are some things I can't reason my way out of, some things that I will never understand. And it's not just me, it's all of us humans. The peace of God, as Paul writes in his Letter to the Philippians, "transcends all understanding".

For me, being faithful means looking for beauty, looking for love, looking for good, even in the midst of darkness. It means believing, in the words of my church, that God is still speaking. "Be joyful," the poet Wendell Berry writes, "even though you have considered all the facts." Of course, we need reason and analysis and evidence. We need to try to deeply understand our world so that we can make it better. That is the primary purpose of universities, and we cannot shirk that duty. But universities are also

places where we ponder the great mysteries and discern how to live a good life. And I believe that there is a place for faith here too.

This Lent, I tried to look for beauty in the world every day. I tried to pay attention to the buds on the trees as I walked my dog; to step outside in the evening and look at the moon; to breathe in the sunsets. As with every Lenten practice, I didn't do it every day, but I did do it most days, and I came to see my practice as an act of faith, of preparation for Easter. I intend to continue this practice of honoring Easter and keeping it all the year. I will try not only to accept and spread the love of God, but to believe that God's love is everywhere, even in a world that is still full of hatred and betrayal and violence. Honoring Easter means, again in Paul's words, thinking about "whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable", and trying to put that into practice.

Will you stand, as you're able, and pray with me? Lord, you sent your son to love us and to teach us how to love. You ask us every day not only to love, but to believe; to let go of our need for understanding, and to experience your presence in the world. Along with the gift of love, we ask for the gift of faith, and we ask for the grace and peace that only you can give us.

Please remain standing as we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us.

"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."

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."

Anya Bassett:

And now let us sing for the beauty of the earth, hymn number four in our Harvard hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing).

Theresa Lungu:

As we go forth into this day, may the beginning of a new day renew our hearts with God's strength and purpose, and may we notice all the beauty on this earth. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.