

Isaac Kim:

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Speaker 2:

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Today's inspired text is by James Baldwin. "Most of us, no matter what we say, are walking in the dark, whistling in the dark. Nobody knows what is going to happen to them from one moment to the next, or how one will bear it."

As I count down the days towards graduation, I've spent time reflecting on my two years here at Harvard. In that reflection, this idea of making the unfamiliar familiar has captivated me. I remember first arriving in Cambridge. After dropping off my suitcases at my apartment, I walked through campus while FaceTiming my parents with my camera turned around. I circled the Kennedy School, crossed Harvard Yard, wildly gesturing to my parents through this foreign screen saying, "There's this building and that building."

I was attempting to show them a glimpse of this new world I was stepping into, this new process of making Harvard familiar. There are three things I've come to appreciate about making the unfamiliar familiar. One, the process is awkward. I don't think awkwardness is something that comes up at morning prayers quite often, but becoming familiar with the place and people involved, introductions and reintroductions, the panic of forgetting names, and getting lost in buildings without the most logical designs. There is joy in the awkwardness, but often the joy comes in retrospect.

Two, the familiar will change. Last year on a particularly icy afternoon, during a ski trip to Killington, Vermont, I found myself on a collision course with a tree. Spoiler alert, the tree won. I fractured my collarbone, requiring surgery, and over the course of a few days, my normal changed. This new normal was filled with long lonely days managing the pain. Only able to use one arm, I couldn't change my sheets or find the AirPod that I had dropped under my bed. And I dreaded the next surgery that was months away.

Up to this point, I had started to feel more at ease in Cambridge, but as my familiar changed, I realized it was my friends and the amazing community around me that helped me through this change. It was my amazing cohort of friends from graduate school that devised a Meal Train so I wouldn't have to cook and provided me with so much laughter and company. It was the university choir that made sure I had a stand, so I didn't need to hold up my music and gave me moments of respite lost in some beautiful music making. The familiar may change, but I've learned, as so eloquently put in many morning prayers before me, that people keep us grounded in this resetting journey from the unfamiliar to familiar.

Three, it's important to treasure the familiar. During my senior year of college at an institution that wasn't Harvard, I served as a leader for a non-religious first year retreat. Each retreat, we drive down winding Virginia highways to arrive at a row of cabins nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains. One Sunday after a particularly exhausting retreat, I remember rushing to clean up, assuring myself that I'll be able to stop and take in the moment at the next retreat. Just wanted to get home. Yet, when lockdowns began two weeks later, I never came back to the retreat center.

I entered my graduate studies determined to treasure the familiar moments. These past two years, I've had the privilege of singing in the university choir, and for this past year, the Ferris Choral Fellows, surrounded by amazingly kind, incredibly talented friends. With each passing Sunday service, even sung in compliance, the U Choir became familiar. But I was determined not to take this group or experience for

granted. The echoing first note of a prelude sung in the Memorial Room. Processions around the church, where I frantically tell myself, "Don't trip." The glorious [inaudible 00:03:40] and carols and Easter Sunday.

The laughter in the Student Oasis after a U chorus stir emerges from a deep slumber on a red beanbag. The, "How are you?" and "How much sleep did you get before morning prayers?" There does seem to be a lack of sleep. It seems to be a trend. I did my best to capture these familiar moments. After graduating from the Harvard Kennedy School, I'll be joining the U.S. Foreign Service as a foreign service officer.

For anyone wondering, "Gee, I wonder where he'll be living for the next few years," you and me both. I'll find out my placement in October. This career involves moving between posts every two to three years, repeating the motions of turning the unfamiliar into familiar with each move. Yet this past week I had a glimpse of the unknowns of my future career as a foreign service officer.

Foreign service officers, friends of friends, found themselves caught outside the embassy compound as violence increased in Sudan. These officers are now thankfully safe, but I am entering a career with many unknowns. As I face starting this journey from the unfamiliar to the familiar all over again, I'm reminded that even when physically alone in a new place, I bring other people with me into my room. My friends, my family, my incredible U Choir community, and that makes starting the process all over all the better.