

Elizabeth Propst:

Oh, give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

Oh, give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Elizabeth Propst:

Oh, give thanks to the Lord of Lords for his mercy, endureth forever.

Congregation:

To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Elizabeth Propst:

To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Elizabeth Propst:

To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth forever.

Elizabeth Propst:

The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth forever.

Elizabeth Propst:

Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

Oh, give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth forever.

Meredith John:

Good morning everyone.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Meredith John:

I'm sorry I've lost my voice, so please bear with me. It's a joy to be with you all today. Thank you, Elizabeth. Thank you everyone in the choir. This is from Matthew 6:28-29, "And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." There's a dedicated English literary tradition to interpreting this set of verses. They toil not, neither do they spin is the epigraph to John Keats's Ode on Indolence, P.G. Wodehouse and Edith Wharton went on to use the image of untoiling lilies to lambast the rich and idle.

American singer-songwriter Connie Converse composed a folk song in the 1950s titled, I Have Considered the Lilies in which she writes, "I can't afford to dilly-dally. I've got to work for my cotton. I have considered the lilies. I have considered how they grow. Tell me, tell me how to be a lily, if you know." Read in this context, the message of the gospels leaves us wanting. That all sounds well and good these writers seem to tell Jesus as he appears in the Gospel of Matthew, except I have to work for my cotton. Keats and Wodehouse and Wharton and Converse are right. There are things in this world that have not always been and will not always be abundant and are indeed scarce. Money, prestigious college admissions, safe drinking water, none of these are distributed evenly or fairly. We are charged with looking at these problems head on and working toward a more just peace. I want to hold and honor that work, which we are called to do, but I also want to imagine the verse as about something else, that which is fundamentally abundant, God's love.

See, I don't think Jesus is trying to teach us that our material lives will be vouch shaped by monotheistic belief. History wouldn't support such a reading anyway. Instead, I think Matthew 6 is trying to teach us that the greatest gifts are the ones we cannot logic or work our ways into. The greatest thing about lilies is not their self-directed colors and designs, not the energy they devote to beautification, but instead their mystery, their lives springing miraculously out of the dark soil. Lilies are perfect because they are God's creation and their beauty is not a marker of their importance. It is just their beauty.

See, Matthew 6 goes on to tell us that, "Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore, take no thought, saying, what shall we eat or, what shall we drink or, wherewithal shall we be clothed? But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

The gospel tells us that each of us are attended to. The gospel asked us to remember that. We should seek the righteousness which English poets and American songwriters and each of us sees missing in the world. But we will in the process be attended to by God. God's unconditional and complete love is a simple message, but it demands a reorganization of ourselves and our worlds. It pushes back against so much of what we live through. I'm coming up on graduation and I took a year off during the COVID-19 pandemic. So like a lot of my class of 2023 peers, this is the end of my fifth year at Harvard. And at Harvard, it's easy to feel that I must work for my cotton, so to speak, that my teachers, advisors, friends, family, coworkers, and classmates will be impressed only by my bright colors, only by a beautiful array.

But God does not arrange all their creation as fields of lilies. This is not, the book of Matthew tells us how God's love always shows up. I hope it will not be too didactic or cloying or artificially sweet if I say that what is sacred about each of us is not our chosen concentrations, professions, aesthetic choices, or institutional affiliations. It is in my humble 23-year-old estimation that we are neither saved nor judged by our GPAs, our team season record or our salaries. Matthew 6 dismisses these adornments, the appearance of a perfect array, the kind that Harvard so often teaches us to cultivate and exalt. Instead, the gospel reminds us of our and everyone else's inherent human dignity. Manifest in the very creation. My prayer is that today we seek righteousness and however non-linear or confused or challenging the process is know that while we are doing it, we are attended to and we are loved.

I'd like to pray for all of us now reciting a prayer from American Trappist Monk and Catholic priest Thomas Merton. During the COVID-19 time off. I spent a few months backpacking in the Appalachians and I would say this prayer over and over reminding myself that I may not know the right way, but it is important that I try.

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me, and I cannot know for certain where it will end, nor do I really know myself. And the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire and all that I am doing. I hope I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, you'll lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadowing of God, I will not fear for you are ever with me and you'll never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please rise in body or spirit for the Lord's prayer. 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 trespassed against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil where 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 trespassed against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil where thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please join in our closing hymn. New Every Morning Is the Love, number 47 in your crimson hymnal.

Christ has no hands in this world but your hands, no voice in this world, but your voice. May our hands and our voices do the work of justice and of love today and all days. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.