

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to our daily service of morning prayers here in the Appleton Chapel of our Memorial Church. Our speaker this morning is Jonathan Lee, who's the associate chaplain for student outreach at the Marsh Chapel of Boston University. I invite you please to rise for our responsorial psalm, which is number 103, number 103 in your black psalter.

Bless the Lord, oh my soul, all my being His holy name.

Congregation:

Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and do not forget all of His bounties.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

He forgives all your sins, heals all your diseases.

Congregation:

He redeems your life from the pit, surrounds you with steadfast love and mercy.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

The Lord executes righteous acts and judgments for all who are wronged.

Congregation:

He made know his ways to Moses, His deeds to the children of Israel.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.

Congregation:

He will not contend forever, or nurse his anger for all time.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor has He requited us according to our iniquities.

Congregation:

For as the heavens are high above the earth], so great is His steadfast love to those who fear Him.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

As east is far from west, so far has He removed our sins from us.

Jonathan Byung Hoon Lee:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Jonathan Byung Hoon Lee:

It is an honor and a privilege to be here with you all this morning. My name is Jonathan Lee and I am the associate chaplain for student outreach at Boston University's Marsh Chapel in the office of religious life. I bring warm greetings from everybody at Marsh Chapel and the rest of us at BU or using a term as you all might know, that school across the river. Today's text is a blessing, a blessing for new beginning by John O'Donohue. Out of the way places of the heart where your thoughts never think to wander, this beginning has been quietly forming, waiting until you are ready to emerge. For a long time, it has watched your desire, feeling the emptiness grow inside you, noticing how you willed yourself on, still unable to leave what you had outgrown. It watched you play with the seduction of safety and the gray promises that sameness whispered, heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent, wondered would you always live like this?

Then the delight when your courage kindled and out you stepped onto new ground, your eyes young again with energy and dream, a path of plenitude opened before you. Though your destination is not yet clear, you can trust the promise of this opening. Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning that is at one with your life's desires. Awaken your spirit to adventure. Hold nothing back. Learn to find ease and risk. Soon you'll be home in a new rhythm, for your soul. Senses the world that awaits you. May the words of my mouth and meditations of all our hearts be holy, pleasing and acceptable in your side to the Lord. Amen.

As any community so closely entwined with a school or university knows, this time of year around early, mid-September is a special one filled with countless new beginnings. The beginning of new classes, new programs and initiatives, new relationships, and for so many people around us, especially our first year students, new chapters in our lives. From the humbler kind of beginning, such as starting a new book, to the grander ones like moving across the country or world, new beginnings in this place are inescapable. Despite their ubiquity, however, new beginnings can also be terrifying affairs. At their core new beginnings require us to step out onto unknown territory and what we do not know or understand can be dangerous and painful.

As O'Donohue reminds us in the blessing, a new beginning requires us to step out and away from the spheres of safety that we have become so familiar with. However, I want to suggest that new beginnings, despite their being intertwined with the unknown, are at the core of our growth and even our sense of self. I want to remind and assure you that a new beginning does not always come with danger, nor does it require a reinvention of oneself. Instead, a good and true new beginning is a reflection of who we are, of who we were, and who we want to be. As O'Donohue writes in the blessing, the grace of a new beginning lies in sync with your life's deepest desires.

The God of the Hebrew and Christian Bible is essentially, I believe, a God of new beginnings. God is constantly inviting people, inviting us, into new beginnings. As we read in the scriptures from Moses and Abraham to the 12 disciples and members of the early church, God's relationship with humanity has been filled with invitations for people to step away from a life of comfort and predictability towards a promise of abundance. "Look, your descendants will outnumber the stars. I promise you that I will bring you out of the land of pain and affliction. Do not be afraid for I will make you of men". With each calling,

God invites his people to embrace a fuller expression of their innermost self to a fuller expression of the person God created them to be. The path is unknown, yes, but the promise is so much fuller than we could imagine.

Of course, these beginnings take time and they do not always yield their promises immediately. According to an Irish proverb, however, a good beginning is half the work. While a beginning can take time to yield fruit, the act of beginning itself means that we are already on the path toward a harvest. What kind of beginning is God inviting you into? What kind of beginning is your soul yearning for? As you continue to dwell in and move beyond this season of new beginnings, whether you are new to this place or have been here for many, many years, may you be bold in your new beginnings. May you awaken your spirit to the adventure that God is calling you to in this season of your life. May you hold nothing back and may you learn to find ease and risk as your soul meets the new world that awaits you. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Jonathan Byung Hoon Lee:

Please join me in prayer. Oh, holy and most glorious God, architect of creation, guide our hands and feet, our eyes and ears, our heads and hearts as we embark on our journey of new beginnings. Give us boldness of heart to not let fear hold us back and keep us safe as we move towards your promise of abundance. In your son's name we pray, amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

I invite you now please to rise and join in saying the prayer 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 you. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever, amen.

Please join in singing our concluding hymn. Number 336, Shall We Gather at the River?

Congregation:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

I have one announcement before our benediction. As Jonathan spoke so beautifully about beginnings, we are experiencing our own season of beginnings here at Harvard with the inauguration of Claudine Gay as our president a week from tomorrow, Friday the 29th of September. Due to security concerns, the university is only allowing those with Harvard IDs onto Harvard Yard on Friday, September 29th. Morning prayers will only be open to those who have access to the yard. You have to have an ID to get in. We will be live-streaming morning prayers if you don't have an ID, so please join us streaming online. Now for the blessing. Glory to God whose power working in us can do intimately more than we can ask

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or imagine, glory to Him from generation to generation to church and to Christ Jesus forever and ever.
Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.