

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

And welcome to Morning Prayers. All who are able, please stand for our responsive reading, Psalm 128, found in your black psalter. "Happy are all who fear the Lord, who follow His ways."

Congregation:

"You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors. You shall be happy and you shall prosper."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house. Your sons like olive saplings around your table."

Congregation:

"So shall the man who fears the Lord be blessed."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"May the Lord bless you from Zion. May you share the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life."

Congregation:

"And live to see your children's children. May all be well with Israel."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(Singing).

Victor Seide:

I will start with two passages by Henry David Thoreau, Harvard class of 1837, taken from his *Autumnal Tints*, published in 1862, on the topic of The Red Maple. "By the 25th of September, the red maples generally are beginning to be ripe. Some large ones have been conspicuously changing for a week, and some single trees are now very brilliant. I notice a small one, half a mile off across a meadow, against the green wood-side there, a far brighter red than the blossoms of any tree in summer, and more conspicuous. I have observed this tree for several autumns invariably changing earlier than its fellows, just as one tree ripens its fruit earlier than another."

He later continues, "Some single trees, wholly bright scarlet, seen against others of their kind still freshly green, or against evergreens, are more memorable than whole groves will be by-and-by. How beautiful, when a whole tree is like one great scarlet fruit full of ripe juices, every leaf from lowest limb to topmost spire, all aglow, especially if you look toward the sun! What more remarkable object can there be in the

landscape? Visible for miles, too fair to be believed. If such a phenomenon occurred but once, it would be handed down by tradition to posterity, and get into the mythology at last."

One of the joys of living here in New England is our annual symphony of color, as captured by Thoreau. We have much to look forward to over the next weeks. Colors that come on seemingly all at once, and then all too quickly will be gone. I have been atop a Vermont forest fire tower at the peak of leaf peeping season, when one looks down on wide swathes of color bursting, where one's eyes can be physically overwhelmed by the awesome beauty, awesome in the full sense of awe that they inspire. But Thoreau asks us to also consider the lone tree against the plain backdrop. That focused beauty, allowing us to consider a singular magnificence, can indeed be all the more memorable.

Those moments help us to pause, to think, to admire. The beetle making its way along the log. A camouflaged toad quietly hiding on the forest floor. Rather than the brash symphony, these moments are the delicate and considered solo performance. Thoreau captured the date in September when the red maples would typically turn, yesterday, the 25th, when he was writing over 160 years ago. For so many of us, certain cycles of the year have been relatively constant in our lifetimes, within, perhaps, just a few weeks of yearly variation; the first branches of colorful leaves in the fall, the migration of geese overhead, the thawing of our ponds in the spring. We want those dates to be fixed and regular.

Yet in our current era, we now feel unmoored. The sense that dates are slipping back or forth in wide steps with the changes we are seeing to our climate. It is a scary time, and Thoreau's call to look around at the brilliant joy that is aglow around us makes us want to be sure to stabilize our natural productions, to bring back a sense of dutiful cycles. While Thoreau reminds us that we should be so grateful that this phenomenon does not occur at once, its fragility makes us ever more concerned whether we'll be able to share such joys with our children and grandchildren. Let us be grateful for the beauty we have all around us, whether in grand natural symphonies, or in smaller solo performances. And let us find the strength and courage to protect what we have, so that this beauty is not handed down merely by tradition, but is instead experienced firsthand, again and again, across generations.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Please rise for prayer. Let us pray. O God of creation, the God who stepped out of your heavenly chambers, who said, "Let there be" and a beautiful world appeared. Let us be grateful of the beauty around us. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Now, let us say the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples saying, "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, for ever and ever. Amen."

Congregation:

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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, for ever and ever. Amen."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Now let us sing together hymn number 189, found in your crimson hymnal, This Is Our Father's World.

Congregation:

(Singing).

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

As we leave this place, but never away from God's presence, may you be reminded that this is our mother's world. And as the speaker has so eloquently persuaded us, to remember to protect our mother's world. Go in peace.

Congregation:

Amen.