

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Welcome to Morning Prayers, we are grateful to have Dr. Evelyn Hammonds this morning. Thank you for being with us. All who are able, please rise for our responsive reading, Psalm 84, found in your black psalter. Psalm 84. "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!"

Congregation:

"My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God."

Congregation:

"Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion."

Congregation:

"As they go through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"Behold, our shield, O God. Look on the face of your anointed."

Congregation:

"For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"For the Lord God is a sun and shield; He bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly."

Congregation:

"O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(Singing).

Evelynn M. Hammonds:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Evelynn M. Hammonds:

First, I'd like to do a short reading and then a verse, and then a short reading and then a reflection. The reading is from Hebrews 11:1. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." And for the reading, I turn to the work of Richard Rohr, and he notes that, "Grace recreates all things. Nothing new happens without forgiveness. We just keep repeating the same old patterns, illusions, and half-truths. True forgiveness does not leave the offender feeling small and judged, but liberated and loved."

In June of 2022, I traveled from Boston to Atlanta to begin my year-long sabbatical from Harvard, and to start my time as the inaugural Audre Lorde Visiting Professor of Queer Studies at Spelman College, which is my alma mater. The moment of my return to Spelman was also my return to live in a city where I was born and grew up. Since my graduation from Spelman and Georgia Tech in 1976, I had only visited friends, family, and colleagues in Atlanta, but I had never spent more than a week there over these almost 50 years.

As my then 19-year-old son and I drove into the outskirts of the city, I began to have a sense of dread about living in this place that I no longer knew. My trepidation was due to the fact that I had left my Atlanta home at the age of 23, because I knew that I could no longer live in a place where my race, sex, and sexuality felt so fraught. I was questioning everything in my world in Atlanta, and I found few sources of solace and understanding or acceptance. I was a young woman studying physics and electrical engineering, fields where Black women were largely absent and invisible. I was questioning my sexuality and my feelings for women. I was questioning what it meant to live in the Deep South, where white people seemed to hold all the power. I was losing touch with family and friends, who I felt, at the time, did not understand or accept me at all, and their lack of acceptance had caused me great pain.

Thus, I worried, "Would I be accepted in this place now? Could I forgive all those people for the pain I believed they had caused me?" To my surprise and delight, as I slowly settled into the routine of setting up my apartment and spending time with colleagues, students, and old friends, old and new friends, the weight of doubt lifted from my shoulders. I recognized that I had changed, and everything in Atlanta had changed. And yet, something basic and fundamental had not. My oldest friends and my new friends reached out to me and they welcomed me as my whole self. They made it abundantly clear that I now had love, family, and acceptance in the places that lacked those very things when I left. My friends showed me that I had never lost the place where I was born and raised, for that place was located in their hearts, and their love for me, and their delight in the woman I have become.

Lastly, my return to Atlanta has also made it possible for me to return to Harvard more grounded in myself. When I left a year ago, I was sad, depressed, and angry, but I return this fall renewed, with an

overwhelming sense of relief that has come with letting go of a desire for forgiveness that is rooted in a hope for a different past. But rather now, I'm here with a deeper sense of hope for a different future, for myself and for my place in this community.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Please rise for prayer. Let us pray. God, we thank you for friends and family who love all of us. Thank you for communities where we feel welcomed. Thank you, O God, that you are the God of love, who extends radical hospitality and grace. In your name we pray, 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, 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."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Now, let us sing hymn number 353, Life of Ages, found in your Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(Singing).

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

As we leave this place, but never away from God's presence, may your soul be anchored in God's love, may your soul be anchored in God's forgiveness. Go in peace.