

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. We're so grateful that our speaker this morning is Austin. All who are able, please stand for our responsive reading, Psalm 34, found in your black Psalter. Psalm 34. Let us read responsively. "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes his boast in the Lord, that the humble hear and be glad."

Congregation:

"My soul makes his boast in the Lord, that the humble hear and be glad."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears."

Congregation:

"I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble. O taste and see that the Lord is good. Happy are those who take refuge in Him."

Congregation:

"O taste and see that the Lord is good. Happy are those who take refuge in Him."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"Come, O children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry."

Congregation:

"The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"The face of the Lord is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all."

Congregation:

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"He keeps all their bones. Not one of them will be broken. The Lord redeems the life of His servants. None of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned."

Congregation:

"The Lord redeems the life of His servants. None of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(Singing).

Austin Bogues:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Morning.

Austin Bogues:

Two weeks ago, while sitting in the Faith & Life Forum at this church on Sunday morning, I told Reverend Potts and the group assembled that, as a journalist and news person, I've often wondered what it would be like to go out and report about Jesus as He walked the earth. We received four gospel accounts in the New Testament, four pieces of good news, four different testimonies to paint the portrait of the person who is at the center of Christianity.

When limited by the boundaries of any journalistic piece that is space or time, it's exceedingly difficult to profile anyone with any certitude of completion. It's difficult to capture their nuance, their idiosyncrasies, their narrative. When covering Jesus, there would be front page news, for sure. There would be the stories about His signs and wonders and miracles, and of course you would write down the catchy quotes, like, "Love thy neighbor as thyself". But there's an old story that editors sometimes tell their cub reporters when they ask for more space and words in an article. The older editor tells the young reporter, "All of World War II can be summed up in a two-word headline: Allies win. Go back and trim the story some more." It's with this story in mind that I thought of the text I selected for today, the shortest verse in the Bible.

It comes from the Gospel of John 11:35, "Jesus wept." There's the headline. Here ends the lesson. The verse is tucked into a report of Jesus visiting His disciples, Mary and Martha, when their beloved brother Lazarus has died. In a few short verses later, Jesus resurrects Lazarus and restores him to life. He restores Lazarus to the arms of his loved ones. He restores Lazarus to his community. At the beginning of John's gospel, the extraordinary person of Jesus is identified as the Logos. He's alleged to be the one who spoke the universe into existence, making all things: the stars, the angels, the oceans, the grains of sand on the shore, the smallest neurons that fire off, that make up the human brain, which gives us consciousness. The Gospel of John invites us to consider that the man in this verse is the author of all of these venues, and the author of the realms we yet have no understanding or perception of.

But I find it comforting that, in the vastness of cosmos, in all the time spent, in all the moments, good and bad, to come, this Word, this author of all creation, could find the compassion to cry with you. As Professor Kimberly C. Patton writes, "Weeping, not sacrifice and not obedience, is as essential to the life of the soul as water is to the life of the body." The gospel singer Yolanda Adams sings in her classic ballad, The Battle Is Not Yours, that, "There is no pain Jesus cannot feel, and there is no sorrow, which He cannot heal."

The problems of today and tomorrow seem so difficult, the conflicts intractable, the pain, the anger, the sorrow, the perplexity is, at times, overwhelming. The New Testament scholar Craig Koester once told me in an interview that God is not blind to injustice, indifferent to pain, or neutral to the cause of those who suffered. And I believe in this theology, nobody can ever cry alone. So, my friends, my sisters, my brothers, but most importantly, my neighbors, my prayer this morning is whatever malady or turmoil you suffer, that God bless and keep you, even as we dare hope for the time of restoration of everything.

If you would, please rise, in body or spirit, for the prayer that 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 evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever 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, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Now let us sing together, hymn number 197, Unto the hills around do I lift up, found in your Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(Singing).

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

As we leave this place, but never away from God's presence, unto the hills around, do we lift our hands to God, remembering that God cries with us. Continue to walk in that hope and love. Go in peace.

Congregation:

Amen.