

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

And welcome to Morning Prayers. All who are able, please rise for our reading, Psalm 66, found in your black Psalter, and we will read responsively. Psalm 66. "Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands. Sing forth the honor of His name, make His praise glorious."

Congregation:

"Sing forth the honor of His name, make His praise glorious."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"Come and see the works of God: He is terrible in His doing toward the children of men. He turned the sea into dry land. They went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in Him."

Congregation:

"He turned the sea into dry land. They went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in Him."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of His praise to be heard. Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved."

Congregation:

"Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou has tried us, as silver is tried. I will go into the house with burnt offerings, I will pay thee my vows."

Congregation:

"I will go into the house with burnt offerings, I will pay thee my vows."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul."

Congregation:

"Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

"Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me." You may be seated.

Choir:

(Singing).

Alexa Albanese:

Good morning, everyone.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Alexa Albanese:

This is an excerpt from Matthew 11:28-29. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." I'm honored to be here today, and I came in, honestly, with the fear that I may be preaching to the choir, and clearly that fear has been realized, but I'll continue. It's truly an honor to be in a place of worship to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community. It is a blessing I have longed for.

I went to Catholic school from pre-kindergarten all the way through college. Growing up, I was an altar server, a lector, and senior year of high school, I had the privilege of writing and reciting the address for a morning prayer. Sound familiar? My high school began and ended each day with a prayer I'd like to share with you. "Sacred heart of Jesus, I place my trust in you. Sacred heart of Jesus, I believe in your love for me." A few weeks after that morning prayer, I slowly started poking my head out of the closet. My parents knew, because they have eyes, but I was too scared of God turning His back on me to break that closet door all the way down. So I ruminated, and I prayed, and sometimes I didn't pray enough.

Then, one night, I had the most vivid dream I have ever experienced. I was in an empty hotel ballroom, very Beauty and the Beast type of elegant, and a man that everyone was convinced was merely dressed like Jesus stood under the grand staircases. I just knew it was Him. I knew it. So I came out to Him, frantically, and He gave me a hug that I still feel when I think about it hard enough. I brought that same gusto to confession, and decided to out myself to a Catholic priest. I said, "Father, while I don't personally feel that this is a sin, I would like to tell you that I'm gay." Frankly, I don't know at the time what I expected him to tell me. Perhaps nothing at all, which I would've taken as the clergy's nod of validation. I didn't want my religion and sexuality to be mutually exclusive, as so many people are indoctrinated to believe.

Without missing a beat, his booming voice said, "Congratulations. Thank you for choosing Jesus over your impulsions. You will save a lot of souls." I dug my teeth into my upper lip, let him finish the final moments of prayer through the partition, and burst out of the room. I stared down a larger-than-life-size Jesus the Divine Mercy tapestry with tears held in my ducts. I don't remember what I said to Jesus through that tapestry, but I am certain the woman who was waiting for her turn at confession does. My guess is I said something like, "I thought we hugged this out? I thought it was all okay?"

I have spent years ruminating and praying, and sometimes I don't pray enough. I've learned that I need to place my trust in Jesus, and in turn, believe in His love for me. For me. My dream is for any person of faith to feel validated by that faith, and know how eternally loved and appreciated they are: exactly as they are. So, if that's God's way of calling me to save a lot of souls, then that is exactly what I intend to do.

For all who are able, I do invite you to stand and pray with me. I believe all of us need some divine protection at this moment, and so, if you will, I would like to read the Prayer of protection for St. Michael the Archangel. "St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan and all evil spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls. Amen."

Congregation:

Amen.

Alexa Albanese:

Thank you.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

As we continue to stand, let us recite 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:

"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."

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Now let us sing together hymn number 313, Lord, Make Us Servants of Your Peace, found in your Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation:

(Singing).

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

As we leave this place, but never away from God's presence, may you be servants of peace. Where there is hate, may you sow love, remembering that Jesus extends His arms with hugs, and may you extend the hug of love to everyone. Go in peace.

Congregation:

Amen.