

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Welcome to our daily worship of Morning Prayers here in Appleton Chapel. We are so grateful today that our speaker is Richard Lazarus. We're so grateful that you are here. He is the Charles Stebbins Fairchild Professor of Law at the Harvard Law School. Thank you for being here.

We ask everyone to please stand for our responsive reading found in your black Psalter, Psalm 27.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Congregation:

When evildoers assail me, uttering slanders against me, my adversaries and foes, they shall stumble and fall.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

Congregation:

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent, he will set me high upon a rock.

Congregation:

Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Congregation:

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the Lord.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

You may be seated.

(singing)

Richard Lazarus:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Richard Lazarus:

On March 31st, 1968, the Reverend Martin Luther King famously declared in a sermon at the Washington National Cathedral that quote, "The arc of the moral universe is long but bends towards justice." A statement so moving in its eloquence and aspiration that is one of King's most celebrated, and one I expect everyone here knows. A statement so powerfully linked to King that it is literally carved into stone on the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Washington D.C. The quotation, however, has long been misunderstood and misused. Many have understood it to mean that justice is inevitable, and on that ground, they frequently condemn those with whom they disagree on major issues as being, quote, "on the wrong side of history."

My own students, unfortunately do this all the time. But they are hardly alone. It is common rhetoric in public policy debate today. On that basis, here are some who others have recently, righteously claimed are on quote, "the wrong side of history." Anti-vaxers, climate deniers, gay rights opponents, White supremacists, anti-Semites, Islamophobes, anti-transgender activists. But its use is not limited to one political party. Donald Trump has claimed that Biden is on the wrong side of history. Jesse Jackson said the same about Biden. And most everyone seems to say one time or another that Donald Trump is on the wrong side of history. They're all wrong. It's not true. None necessarily are, for a simple reason.

History cannot be assumed. One cannot passively sit back safe in the contentment that history will go your way. That anti-vaxers, whoever it is, will lose. That gay rights and transgender activists will prevail. Or that climate activists will succeed. In short, that your view of justice will prevail. History must be won. If you care about climate change, you must work for it. If you care about social justice, you must work for it, by political action, by voting, by committing your time, your skills, and your resources, and ultimately, by persuading others. Otherwise, justice will not happen.

History does not bend towards the passive. Instead, just the opposite. If you assume history will go your way, it is far less likely to do so. Recent events in all of our lives make that clear. Of course, Reverend King understood that. He was famously peaceful and nonviolent, but he was most certainly not passive. He fought for social justice. He fought for racial equality. And he sought to overcome racial injustice. And as stirring as his oratory was, King did not just talk the talk. He famously and literally walked the walk. The 1963 March on Washington for jobs and freedom. The 1965, 5 day march from Montgomery to Selma Alabama, culminating in bloody Sunday as protesters were attacked as they crossed the Edmund Pettus bridge.

One week later, President Lyndon Baines Johnson introduced the Voting Rights legislation. The President in introducing that legislation referred to what happened at Selma as a turning point in US history, akin to the battles of Lexington Concord in the American Revolution. Just a few miles down the road here in Massachusetts Avenue, Reverend King made history. And that is my wish for all of you as we begin yet another spectacular year in our lives.

Study history. Live history. But make history too in your own lives, whether in small or big ways, to ensure it bends towards justice. Thank you.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

All who are able, please rise for prayer. Let us pray. Almighty God, may we be conduits of love. May we be advocates of justice. May we do the work to make this world a better place. In your name we pray. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Now, let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught his disciple saying,

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.

Now let us sing together hymn number 355. Give Ear, Ye Children, to My Law.

(singing)

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

As we leave this place, but never away from God's presence, may you make history too, and may it bend toward justice. Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.