

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to the Appleton Chapel here in the Memorial Church for this, our daily service of morning prayers. I invite you, please... Oh, excuse me. Our speaker this morning is Aric Flemming, who is assistant director of doctoral programs at Harvard Business School, and importantly, former seminarian of this church. Please rise and join in our responsorial reading, which is Psalm 31 in your black salter. "In thee, oh Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed. Deliver me in thy righteousness."

Congregation:

"Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defense to save me."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore, for my name's sake, lead me and guide me."

Congregation:

"Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me, for thou art my strength."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Into thine hand, I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, oh Lord God of truth."

Congregation:

"I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy; for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: thou hast set my feet in a large room."

Congregation:

"I said in my haste, I am cut off before thine eyes. Nevertheless, thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried upon thee."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Oh, love the Lord, all ye His saints: for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer."

Congregation:

"Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord."

(Singing)

The Rev. Aric Fleming:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Aric Fleming:

Oh, it's a pleasure to be back with all of you this morning. So many familiar faces after surviving a whole pandemic and the terrors of the world, all the things that are going on, we're still here. God be praised.

This morning, I'm going to let you into my diary a little bit. Is that okay?

Congregation:

Mm-hmm.

The Rev. Aric Fleming:

Yeah? I'm going to go to a very... I guess, a common book that we've all probably been familiar with as we've grown up in Christianity, Psalms. One of the Psalms, Psalm 120. The first verse, which reads, sounds actually like a diary entry, "In my distress, I cry to the Lord that he may answer me. In my distress, I cry to the Lord that he may answer me." And I responded this way. In my lived experience, I've been taught that God is not obliged to answer a request, a summons, a directive. But God's all powerful nature is seemingly sufficient to justify his intentional silence. I call this talk God in the Silence.

As a child, I wondered why it seemed like God would never audibly answer my prayers whenever I prayed. But now that I'm older, I must admit that my prayers somehow manifested themselves in time, but without answers. How could this be? I'm standing right in the middle of Harvard Memorial Church, at Harvard University, without an answered prayer to a prayer I prayed years ago, and still it happened, and God was silent.

Does it not anger you when God's silence sounds like denial, when God's inactivity looks like rejection, when God's avoidance feels like betrayal? What is the proper response to a God that will not answer you when you need it most? We pray for better jobs and economic stability, yet we hear nothing. We pray for strong bodies and good health, yet we hear nothing. We pray for peace in the Middle East and that fires will cease, yet we hear nothing. We pray for political direction in the face of Democratic destruction, yet we hear nothing. And still, we intend to remain committed followers of the way.

When I was old enough to realize that my father passed before I was born, I wondered, for most of my life, what was it that I had missed? I saw my classmates in school being picked up by their fathers and before my amazing stepfather came along, I wondered where my father might be. He's not here. How will I ever learn about myself without him? I have so many questions that can never be answered now. He can't hear me. I can't hear him. He's gone, and I have no direction.

So, as a very young child, I developed a coping mechanism through the grieving process that forced me to imagine he was there. Every day, during recess, I climbed up the tree and sat there as if I was in Heaven with him. There, he visited me. I knew it. I couldn't see him, but I felt his presence. I couldn't hear him, but I knew he was speaking. I couldn't feel him, but I knew he was holding me. The kids

might've called me crazy, but I called myself creative. Creative enough to imagine the world I wanted to live in and not settling for the world I felt was handed to me.

His silence, his absence, his voided presence forced me to use my imagination in that tree. And I can tell you that those seeds of imagination were planted so deep that I still to this day employ my imagination when it seems like God is silent. For, in my distress, I cry to the Lord that he may answer me. Then I realized, there was a presence here all along. I ended up in the spaces I prayed to have access to. I tapped into the peace of mind I was hoping for. I manifested the power I needed to achieve my greatest goals, and I realized something. The entire time, while I was waiting on God, there was a presence, proven by action but never verified by words. Then I wondered, could the presence be God, even if God isn't saying anything? So, my thoughtful conclusion asserts that God might be somewhere in the silence.

Oh, wait, wait, wait, wait, no. What if God is the silence present with me in my distress, seated with me in my despair, waiting with me in my discomfort? Is that the same God who also celebrates with me in my victories, laughs with me in my joys, and dances with me in my triumph? Somewhere, I read that God will never leave you nor forsake you, and that remains true. That, even in silence, God is still there. Even in silence, God is answering, by action, by will, by deed, God's answer comes to life.

So, my friends, we may never hear the audible word, because God isn't just in the silence, but perhaps it means that God is the silence, and when it is that God surrounds you, all things are made well, whole and brand new. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

I invite you, please, to rise now for the prayers. The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Gracious God, in you we live and move and have our being. We humbly pray you so to God and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life, we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And now, let us pray the words Jesus taught us, saying, "Our Father-"

All:

"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 trespassed 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. Matthew Potts:

Our concluding hymn is number 341, In Christ There is No East or West.

Congregation:

(Singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

I look forward to seeing you downstairs after the service in the Undercroft for MemCafé and in this chapel this evening at 5:15 for holy communion.

Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation in the church and to Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.