

Congregation:

[inaudible 00:00:09].

Steph Grossano:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Steph Grossano:

And welcome to Morning Prayers. Our speaker this morning is the Reverend Daniel Smith. He's both my professor and the senior minister at the First Church in Cambridge. Welcome. Our service this morning will begin with a responsive reading of Psalm 155. Please rise, in body or spirit, as we read the Psalm responsively by whole verse. "In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills."

Congregation:

"Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob.'"

Steph Grossano:

"That He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths."

Congregation:

"For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Steph Grossano:

"He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away."

Congregation:

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks."

Steph Grossano:

"Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

Congregation:

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?"

Steph Grossano:

"Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?"

Congregation:

"Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?"

Steph Grossano:

"Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul?"

Congregation:

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Steph Grossano:

Please be seated.

Choir:

(singing).

The Rev. Damiel Smith:

Our reading this morning comes from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, starting at 4:1. "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace." Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Damiel Smith:

Standing here today, I'm once again struck with gratitude for my teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend of beloved memory, Peter Gomes. I first preached here over 25 years ago on a Thursday afternoon, as a student in his Introduction to Public Preaching seminar. After our small cohort had given our first round of sermons from the sanctuary pulpit out there, "10 feet above contradiction," as Peter would say, we adjourned to a room downstairs for what he would call the autopsy.

Fortunately, we weren't dead yet, and we trusted Gomes to be the good physician of the soul he was. I think he relished taking a scalpel right to our guts. The first thing he said to me after my sermon was, "Mr. Smith, there will be no oners and gunners in Memorial Church. You come from a tradition of Jonathan Edwards, not the New Kids On The Block." And then he turned to my classmate, my colleague, and said this. She had just preached a super-dense sermon, chock-full of references to the Oxford and Anchor Bible commentaries, and he said, "Ms. Kane, your sermon reminds me of a plum pudding. Yes, that's it. Take one bite of plum pudding and you say, 'Oh, that's delicious.' But after that bite, you say, 'No more plum pudding.' So, Ms. Kane, next time, I invite you to try for a custard. A souffle, even. Just no more plum pudding."

Gomes had a knack for honest feedback, for telling us the often piercing truth we needed to hear. Yet he would usually share it with enough humor, encouragement, or elevation of the task that we left feeling empowered to go forth and lead lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called. Several years later, we were sharing a steak dinner in Central Square, just the two of us, and I asked him for his off-the-cuff definition of the good news of the gospel. He said, without missing a beat, "You don't have to be as you are."

I was reminded of this line when reading our passage for today. It's the same wisdom that led Peter to beg his students and listeners to break the chain of our habits, of our patterns of striving perfectionism, of our taking things too seriously or not seriously enough. Instead, he invited us to trust a deeper process of spiritual transformation already at work in each of us. One that would rise and shine whenever we stopped trying to prove or improve ourselves, and instead started to align ourselves with higher purpose, with whom God called us and created us to be. Gomes would say it's what assured Zacchaeus that he didn't have to be just a tax collector. It's what assured Peter that he didn't have to be just a fisherman. It's what assures me that I don't have to be just a minister.

Friends, we don't have to be as we are. We don't have to be that way we sometimes are. In the Christian tradition, it's the season of Easter time. So, to bring this home a bit, I invite us to imagine the risen Christ, work with me here, standing before us today, speaking this message to each of our hearts. You don't have to be as you are. Can you feel yourself constrict a bit at the thought, or are you still puzzled by it? See if any of these versions land. You don't have to be so opinionated, so anxious about what others think. You don't have to show everyone how smart you are. You don't have to be such a pushover, or perfectionist, or so curmudgeonly, or complacent, or careful, or cool. You don't have to be so loud, or quiet, or so exacting, or demanding, or doubtful. Maybe He's telling us we don't have to be so privileged, as in we could give it away or share it.

Or, imagine the risen Christ saying this to our world after what He endured on Good Friday, returning with peace and nonviolent love in His heart, as if to break the age-old pattern of scapegoating, shame, and blame, and vengeance, and violence. Humans, you don't have to be that way. Imagine the divine just waiting to enlarge our imaginations, to broaden our horizons, to deepen our love, yet ever calling us back to our truest selves, which we have yet to fully discover? You don't have to be as you are. Go ahead and fill in the blank, and feel the freedom of this good news. You don't have to be that way. Try for a custard. A souffle, even. For the source of love is always calling us to transformation. Receive this higher calling again and again with all humility and patience, ever bearing with one another in love. Amen.

Steph Grossano:

Will you pray with me? God of change, you've called us each to a divine purpose. Give us the courage to live into that divine purpose. Bring us the mentors and the support that we need. Help us to see the resurrected Christ as our guide. Help us to know that we do not have to be as we are, and we do not have to change without your help. We ask this in your name, amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Steph Grossano:

And together let us pray as Jesus taught His disciples. "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:

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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."

Steph Grossano:

Please rise, in body or spirit, as we sing hymn 312, Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.

Congregation:

(singing).

Steph Grossano:

As we go into this day, may we remember that as we live into our divine purpose, Jesus goes before us. Walk in love, go in peace. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

[inaudible 00:17:23].

I'm so sorry. [inaudible 00:17:42]. I know, [inaudible 00:18:30].