

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Good morning and welcome to our daily service of morning prayers here in Appleton Chapel. We're so grateful that you are here this morning. Our speaker today is Alexis Redding from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Thank you for being here. Please stand, those who are able, for our responsive reading found in your black Psalter. Psalm 107. "Oh, give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever."

Audience:

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Whom He has redeemed from trouble-"

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

"... and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south."

Audience:

"Let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love, for His wonderful works for the sons of man."

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

"For he satisfies him who is thirsty and the hungry he fills with good things."

Audience:

"Some sat in darkness and gloom, prisoners in affliction and in irons-"

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

"... for they had rebelled against the words of God and spurned the council of the most high."

Audience:

"There hearts were bowed down with hard labor. They fell down with none to help."

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

"Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress."

Audience:

"He brought them out of darkness and gloom and broke their bonds asunder."

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

You may be seated.

MUSIC:

Our Father who art in Heaven.

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done 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 forever and ever.

Amen.

Alexis Redding:

Good morning everyone. Thank you for being here and a special thanks to my former students, to friends and colleagues, who woke up early to surprise me to sit with us today. 15 months ago, my father passed away. It was sudden and completely unexpected. All of us fear losing the people we love, but we rarely consider, "What if there is no chance to even say goodbye?" A few months after he died, as I continued to struggle with my reality, my fiancée hosted a dinner in Los Angeles and by pure chance, I ended up at the end of the table next to two women who had also lost their fathers in the previous six months. Throughout the night, as we fell into easy and knowing conversation, we talked about our dads, about loss, and about how the experience had changed each of us so profoundly.

One woman then shared how she had written a eulogy for her father and this profound sense of regret that filled her as she read it, knowing that she had never told him how much she admired him, instead, waited until this posthumous task to put words to those feelings. I was silent as I heard her say this. I felt her sorrow, but in that moment, what I mostly felt was relief. For the first time since my father died, because I couldn't relate, my father knew how deeply I loved him, even without the chance for a final goodbye, I felt sure that there was nothing left unsaid between us. In the hundreds of miles of walks we had taken and the hundreds of hours of calls over the decades, I knew that he knew my gratitude, my admiration, and my love.

Yet as the months passed, through my grief, small doubts crept in. "Did he truly know how much he meant to me? Had I actually said it enough while he was still here?" I didn't think there would be an answer to that question. I thought it would haunt me. But there was, in a surprising way. Months later, while sorting through his things, I discovered one of those deep file drawers filled with every card and letter I had ever sent to him. Birthday cards, Father's Day cards, cards for the holidays, some filled with bad puns and dad jokes I knew he would like. Others with heartfelt sentiments, sometimes my own, sometimes Hallmark's. There were long letters and short Post-it notes, notes I had left behind after visits home. I hadn't ever thought about what he might do with them, but I certainly would not have imagined that he kept them for all of those years, carrying hundreds of cards with him throughout more than a dozen moves that my family had made. And as I read them gradually, one by one over the weeks that followed, I was reassured it was true.

I had left nothing unsaid and he had heard me and he had held onto those words. When I finished reading the cards, it was June. Both his birthday and Father's Day fell within a couple of days of each other and I couldn't help myself when I passed by the card island at Target, decked out in the tans and blues for the occasion of honoring fathers, I was drawn to that. I went to the racks and I stood there looking at the cards, picking out the ones that would've been perfect for him. There was a really good dad joke in there. That was so bittersweet. I had no reason to buy them, not now. So I put them back on the rack and I turned to walk away. But then I turned back because I realized that there was something

else I could do. Over the next half hour, I pored over the racks nearby, picking out 10 new cards, not for my dad this time, but in his memory.

There were other people in my life who didn't know how much I cared about them, and I knew that I could change that. That week, as friends and family around the country received my cards, they sent texts of surprise and delight at the unexpected delivery, and I knew that this was a new ritual for how I would honor my dad for each big occasion moving forward, sending notes of love and gratitude to the people in my life who don't hear it enough, or for whom there isn't a holiday occasion on the books to remind him to reach out and send a note. That is how I will honor each big occasion that makes me think of him. Except for one. Next Friday I'm getting married and this is surely a moment to send a heartfelt message from a daughter to a father, but in his absence, which I feel so acutely as I prepare for such a special day, I decided I would send a different message to mark this moment, one to all of you, and to everyone who's listening.

I wanted to share this ritual. So in honor of the kindest and most thoughtful man I have ever known, a call to action for each of us. If there is something that you have left unsaid to the people who matter in your life, consider reaching out today. Look for ways to cherish them while they're still here, and for those of you who are also grieving the loss of someone you love, find small but unexpected ways to honor them after they are gone as well. And allow me to start us off. From this sacred space on this beautiful morning in Cambridge, I share my thanks to the woman in the front room by my side today as she has been every day of these difficult 15 months, my bride-to-be, I love you, I appreciate you, and because I couldn't resist, the card I asked you to tuck into your jacket pocket, is for you to remind you just how much.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Please rise in body and spirit for prayer. Loving God, we ask you to surround us as we remember those who have gone on before us. May we feel your presence and love as we grieve and may we have those moments in our lives to honor them. In your name we pray, amen. Let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, saying...

Audience:

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 forever and ever. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Now let us sing together. Hymn number 331, entitled Love is Kind and Suffers Long, found in your hymnal.

Audience:

Love is kind and suffers long.

Love is meek, and thinks no wrong.

Love than death itself more strong.

Therefore give us love.

Prophecy will fade away.

Melting in the light of day.
Love will always with us stay.
Therefore give us love.
Faith will vanish into sight.
Hope be emptied in delight.
Love in heaven will shine more bright.
Therefore give us love.
Faith and hope and love we see.
Joining hand in hand agree.
But the greatest of the three.
And the best is love.

The Rev. Dr. Calvin Jones:

Love is kind and suffers long. Love will always be with us. As you leave this place, but never away from God's love, as you leave this gathering, but never away from God's grace, as you remember, those who have gone on before you, those who have a special place in your heart, may you remember that love never dies. Let us bless the Lord.

Audience:

Praise be to God.

MUSIC:

(instrumental music)