

Harriett Lindeman:

Thank you.

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Harriett Lindeman:

And welcome to Morning Prayers here in Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Angela Wu, class of '17, a resident tutor of Pforzheimer House, and one of our choir members singing this morning. Yay, Angela.

Please rise in body and in spirit for responsive reading of Psalm 33, found in your black Appleton psalter. Sing forth, O you righteous, to the Lord; it is fit that the upright acclaim Him.

Congregation:

Praise the Lord with the lyre; with the ten-stringed harp sing to Him.

Harriett Lindeman:

Sing Him a new song; play sweetly with shouts of joy.

Congregation:

For the word of the Lord is right; His every deed is faithful.

Harriett Lindeman:

He loves what is right and just; the earth is full of the Lord's faithful care.

Congregation:

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, by the breath of His mouth, all their host.

Harriett Lindeman:

He heaped up the ocean waters like a mound, stores the deep in vaults.

Congregation:

Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world dread Him.

Harriett Lindeman:

For He spoke, and it was; He commanded, and it endured.

Congregation:

The Lord frustrates the plans of nations, brings to naught the designs of peoples.

Harriett Lindeman:

What the Lord plans endures forever, what He designs, for ages on end.

(singing)

Angela Wu:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Angela Wu:

Today's inspired text comes from the 6th novel of the Harry Potter series, Harry Potter and Half-Blood Prince. "Trust me, I know what I'm doing, or at least Felix does." Harry Potter, the protagonist of the series is referring to a magical potion called Felix Felicis, that when consumed, makes the drinker lucky for a certain period of time. Harry slips some of this potion into his best friend Ron Weasley's drink on the morning of the game of the wizarding sport of Quidditch, resulting in a near-perfect game for Ron.

There are moments of mystery and magic in all our lives. When I was in high school, one of those moments for me was when I babysat a four-year-old boy, Jules. Before leaving, his father mentioned that he was teaching Jules French. Having just returned from studying in France, I was excited to help in this endeavor, and later that evening I wrote the sentence, E m'appelle Jules J'ai Quatre ans. My name is Jules, I'm four years old. I asked Jules to copy the sentence onto a piece of paper, and he did, in the way that kids do, diagonally towards the top right of the page. Some letters huge and others tiny, resulting in a squiggly caterpillar-like sentence.

When Jules father returned home, he looked at the piece of paper, his eyes wide. "Did Jules write this?" I answered that he did. His father said, "This is the first sentence that Jules has ever written."

I was 17 at the time, and I had no idea that children only begin to form letters and words at four to five years. Because I just assumed that Jules could write a whole sentence, and because he probably was unsure of how to share the key contextual factor that he had never written a sentence before, he just did it. Psychologists have a term for this, self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own capability to successfully perform a particular task or achieve a specific goal.

Over the past two years, I have experienced self-efficacy myself, as a member of the university choir right here in Memorial Church. When Ed emailed me to tell me that I had made it into the choir, I could not believe it. But during our first rehearsal, I literally could not believe that I was supposed to be there. During our warm-up, Ed has us singing nine note scales, quickly and in succession, moving progressively higher and higher in pitch. On that day, we started going so high that I laughed, thinking this was some sort of initiation for the new members. Nobody else laughed. And I realized that this was a serious choir of a caliber I had never personally been exposed to in my life. If I thought the warm-ups would be the biggest surprise, boy was I wrong. We were sight-reading new music every rehearsal, and incredibly, magically, it sounded good on the first time, every time. Every time.

I was filled with wonder and also fear. I felt like I was not at the standard required to be part of the choir. And I reached out to Ed, and explained to him that I was having trouble with the music, though I didn't tell him that I felt like I just could not do it. Ed surprised me by how calmly and assuredly he responded, giving me a few helpful tips to improve my sight-reading, and simply urging you not to worry. Basically, Ed was saying, "You've written letters and words before, you're ready to write sentences."

The same for the two choristers, Julia and Sophia, I'm grateful today, thank you for coming, standing on either side of me, who didn't look at me with judgmental glares as I expected them to. But by not doing anything, they unknowingly gave me the confidence that whatever I was doing was probably just fine, and it made me believe that I could. And two years later, I've somehow kept up.

I told you earlier, that Harry slipped some of the Felix Felicis potion into Ron's drink, resulting in a near-perfect game for Ron. What I didn't tell you, is that Harry hadn't given Ron the potion at all. It was a placebo. We don't need to spike someone's drink with some magical potion to make them believe in themselves. Our belief in them can be enough.

Well, there's obviously a time and place for this. As an Australian surf lifesaver, I can tell you that just because you believe your friend can swim in some of the most dangerous surf conditions in the world, it does not make it a good idea for them to swim outside the flags. While I lack wisdom and experience in other domains, I've given some thought as to when it would make sense to show someone that you think they're capable of meeting challenging goals and to act as their Felix Felicis.

First, we should notice if they have experience or have shown progress in a similar activity. You've written letters and words before you're ready to write sentences.

Second, we shouldn't be afraid to encourage them to start small. Running a little further than they ever have in one go, or asking one more person for help before giving up. Even if their sentence looks like a caterpillar at first, we all know that caterpillars eventually turn into butterflies. Or moths, but butterflies.

And finally, we should ask ourselves if we might be holding ourselves back? Are we about to give up when it's our perspective, our mindset, our belief, and not the end goal that needs to be different? Do we simply need to find that Felix Felicis somewhere in our lives?

I want to end by saying thank you. Thank you, Ed, so much for believing in me. Thank you David and Matt for your encouragement. Thank you to the choir and the staff at Mem Church. And to you all for creating a home where every Morning Prayers and Sunday service feels like a drop of Felix Felicis. I feel that I have found and discovered magic here in Memorial Church, not in some drinkable substance, but in its people.

Harriett Lindeman:

Please rise in body and spirit in prayer. Loving God, we come together in the sun on this day that you have made. Let us remain open to the magic and the mystery around us, and within us, helping us see the possibility in one another. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Harriett Lindeman:

And now, let us pray as Jesus taught, 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.

Harriett Lindeman:

Let us sing the hymn, We Know That Christ Is Raised, number 166.

(singing)

As we prepare to leave this place, the peace of God in your hearts, the love of God be in your hands, the joy of God be in your soul. Go in peace. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.