

Steph Grossano:

Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning.

Steph Grossano:

And welcome to morning prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning is Auds Hope Jenkins. She's a third year Master of Divinity student at Harvard Divinity School. Welcome. Please rise in body or spirit. Our service will begin with a responsive reading of Psalm 29 found in your black Appleton psalter book. Please make the responses in bold.

The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

Audience:

Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

Steph Grossano:

There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard.

Audience:

Yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun.

Steph Grossano:

Which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

Audience:

Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them and nothing is hid from its heat.

Steph Grossano:

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.

Audience:

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes.

Steph Grossano:

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

Audience:

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

Steph Grossano:

You may be seated.

Auds Hope Jenkins:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God. Matthew 5:3. In an interview with Krista Tippet, Reverend Barbara Brown Taylor highlights the first line of Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." When asked for her interpretation of this somewhat bewildering verse, Reverend Taylor says, "All I can imagine is that in whatever congregation I am thinking of or Jesus imagined, there are some spiritual cats hanging around kind of flaunting their goods and there are some people sitting a few rows behind them who said, 'I am so inadequate. I am such a loser.' And this was some kind of bread being offered to them to not compare themselves to those who seemed so rich in spirit." Can we just pause for a minute to appreciate the imagery of a bunch of big-wig spiritual cats out there flaunting their goods. Now that's what I call prophetic vision.

I'm a third-year student at the Divinity School and we don't talk about this very much, but at the Div School, where many of us are preparing to be spiritual leaders of some sort, I feel that there's a certain unspoken pressure to be people of exceptional spiritual richness. And sometimes we absolutely are. Sometimes the spirit is moving and the words are flowing and the divine is very, very near. And sometimes it's very much not like this. Sometimes I know that I, and I suspect we, feel like imposters or interlopers or total losers at the cosmic spiritual game. And if I'm being honest, I am very here for that. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," I believe that he meant blessed are we when we do not know. When the spirit is not moving, when the words are not flowing, when the pain of the world feels so great and God feels very, very small. This morning, I would like to honor that hallowed destitution of spirit and the courage it takes to admit that we do not have all the answers.

I was born in Korea and adopted as a baby by a white evangelical pastor in rural Iowa. And before you ask, no, there were no other Asians and yes, it was very rough. Growing up in conservative Christian America was a trip. I was taught racist, misogynistic, homophobic lies in Jesus' name, things that directly negated my very existence and for a long time, I believed them. People often ask me what my turning point was. When did I decide that enough was enough? It's a good question, but of course there is no straightforward answer. College was the start of an unraveling. There, I acquired names for the hurts I knew in my bones and I began to see the way that my white Christian community was implicated. I wondered how I had managed to stay so long. I wondered how I could ever leave.

This is not a linear narrative. If there's a before and after, it is cut with jagged edges. Still, things have changed. At some point in my adulthood, I realized that I had become someone that my family no longer recognizes and in doing so, I glimpsed myself for the first time. Yet I didn't know her either, really, and I wasn't sure if I would ever know anything ever again. I had been so deceived before and I had mistaken that for spiritual richness. But through my Buddhist practice, I have come to a very different place with this sense of not knowing. In some ways, not knowing has become the foundation of my practice because it has allowed me to break free of the illusions of certainty to finally pay attention to what really is and also what can be.

Suzuki Roshi wrote, "In the beginner's mind, there are many possibilities. In the expert's, there are few." As horrific conflicts continue to claim thousands of irreplaceable lives, as white supremacy froths and

rages through the fissures in our polarized country, and as our climate collapses like a crusting wave, I believe we need to embrace not knowing as our spiritual guide through the darkness. We may feel deeply inadequate in the face of incomprehensible suffering, and yet this is the exact moment when we need to lock into not knowing as a fertile place of possibility. When we feel inadequate, we are tempted to turn away from suffering, but we must turn toward it with great compassion and accepting that we don't know is the first step toward doing so. Because only when we have walked to the point of not knowing, of going off script, of walking off the edges of the map will we ever discover the new world of possibilities that we so desperately seek.

And so I'm happy to admit, as a soon-to-be graduate of the Div School, I am very poor in spirit and I am deep in the heart of not knowing and I can't wait to find out what's on the other side.

Steph Grossano:

Will you pray with me? Loving and gracious God, help us to repent of the ways that your word and your way has been used towards racist and sexist and homophobic ends. God, be with us in the unknowing, the unlearning, in the wilderness that we are called to where we can see more clearly what it is to follow you and to turn towards the suffering of this world. Help us to persevere in our poorness of spirit, knowing that you have called it blessed. Amen.

Will you pray with me 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, forever and ever. Amen. Please rise in body or spirit as we sing Hymn 344, Precious Lord Take My Hand.