

Audience:

[inaudible 00:05:29].

Speaker 1:

Good morning.

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Speaker 1:

Welcome to Appleton Chapel here in our memorial church for our daily service of morning prayers. Our speaker this morning is Caroline Light, senior lecturer and director of Undergraduate studies in Women and Gender and Sexuality studies. I invite you now to rise as you're able and join in today's Psalter, number 139 in the black books. "Oh Lord, you have searched me and know me."

Audience:

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

Speaker 1:

You search out my path and lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

Audience:

Even before a word is on my tongue, oh Lord, you know it completely.

Speaker 1:

You hem me in behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

Audience:

Such knowledge is wonderful for me, it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Speaker 1:

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

Audience:

If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed [inaudible 00:06:53] you are there.

Speaker 1:

If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the furthest limits of the sea ...

Audience:

Even there your hand shall receive me and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Speaker 1:

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me and the light around me become night."

Audience:

Even the darkness [inaudible 00:07:17] dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Speaker 1:

You may be seated.

MUSIC:

What the dew is to the flower, gentle words are to the soul; and a blessing to the giver, and so dear to the receiver, we should never withhold. What the dew is to the flower, gentle words are to the soul; and a blessing to the giver, and so dear to the receiver, we should never withhold. Gentle words kindly spoken often soothe the troubled mind, while links of love are broken by words that are unkind. Then O thou gentle spirit, my constant guardian be, "Do to others," be my motto, "as I'd have them do to me."

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Caroline Light:

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Audience:

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Caroline Light:

Last week was the conclusion of the Jewish High Holy Days, we also call them The Days of Awe. I'd like to share today an excerpt of a poem by Irena Klepfisz called Dedications to Bashert. "These words are dedicated to those who died because a card was lost and a number was skipped, because a bed was denied, because a place was filled and no other place was left. These words are dedicated to those who died because someone did not follow through, because someone overlooked and forgot, because someone left everything to God, because someone was late, because someone did not arrive at all, because someone told them to wait and they just couldn't. These words are dedicated to those who died because death is a punishment, because death is a reward, because death is the final rest. These words are dedicated to those who died. Bashert."

Bashert is Yiddish for inevitable or predestined. Irena Klepfisz published this poem in 1982. Klepfisz was born in 1941 in the Warsaw ghetto. She and her mother were able to survive and escape the Holocaust by passing as Christians. They succeeded in immigrating to the U.S. when Irena was eight. Irena would go on to co-found and lead the Jewish Women's Committee to end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. She also contributed to a now canonical feminist collection called Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology. I turn to Klepfisz when I reflect on the inevitability of death, of loss, and if we are fortunate in this life to love, the inevitability of grief. Since 1982, the dedications to Bashert has traveled across

boundaries and borders as a poem of remembrance and loss. It's been read at countless Holocaust commemorations and at memorial services for those who died from AIDS. Klepfisz's words were with me this year on Yom Kippur as I reflected on the devastation and pain of the year as I ponder the difficulty of holding my sense of responsibility, my own suffering, while recognizing and honoring the grief of others.

Klepfisz's poem asks us to consider the inevitability and the inevitable randomness of loss. We memorialize those lost even as we ponder the accidents of circumstance that took them away, leaving us behind to reckon not only with an overpowering absence, but with a sense that something could have been done to prevent the loss. If only we had arrived on time. If only we had followed through on our promises. Bashert reads today like a challenge in these politically polarizing times and maybe a warning. Bashert's predestination is full of loopholes. We have the power to intervene, to show up for each other in a fractured world, to hold each other through our immeasurable grief. Rabbi Sharon Brous tells us to resist the urge to look away from that grief, especially when avoidance might be our natural first impulse. Rabbi Brous envisions a ritualization of care where we turn to each other at those very moments when we most want to retreat.

She calls this ethic of care, the Amen Effect, and sometimes it is as straightforward as looking into the eyes of the brokenhearted and offering quiet recognition, seeing their suffering without trying to justify or to rationalize it. When faced by the suffering we see all around us, whether in the eyes of companions or of passing strangers, of people separated by thousands of miles, but nevertheless tethered to us by our shared humanity, our shared vulnerability. We offer our recognition. We say, Amen, I see you and I accept responsibility for your care. Today, I offer a prayer. Ve'al kulam often spoken on the day of atonement for the times when we have missed the mark. Ve'al kulam Eloha s'lichot, s'lach la-nu, m'chal lanu, s'lach lanu, m'chal lanu, kaper lanu. For all the ways we have missed the mark, we ask the spiritual reality of the universe to forgive us, to pardon us, and to accept our atonement. Amen.

Audience:

Amen.

Caroline Light:

Please rise for the Lord's Prayer.

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 trespassed against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Speaker 1:

Now friends, please remain standing for our closing hymn, which is number 254, Mothering God, You Give Me Birth.

MUSIC:

Mothering God, you gave me birth in the bright morning of this world. Creator, source of every breath, you are my rain, my wind, my sun. Mothering Christ, you took my form, offering me your food of light.

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Grain of life, and grape of love, your very body for my peace. Mothering Spirit, nurturing one, in arms of patience hold me close. So that in faith I root and grow until I flower, until I know.

Speaker 1:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

MUSIC:

Amen.