

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to our daily service of Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel of our Memorial Church. We continue today our series of Senior Talks, and our speaker this morning is David Chen of Leverett House.

I invite you please to rise and join in our opening Psalm, which is number 119.

Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.

Congregation:

Happy are those who keep his degrees, who seek him with their whole hearts.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways.

Congregation:

You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes.

Congregation:

Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let my cry come before you, O Lord; give me understanding according to your word.

Congregation:

Let my supplication come before you; deliver me according to your promise.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

My lips will pour forth praise, because you teach me your statutes.

Congregation:

My tongue will sing of your promise, for all your commandments are right.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.

Congregation:

I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let me live that I may praise you, and let your ordinances help me.

Congregation:

I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.
(singing)

David Chen:

Brothers, sisters, friends, good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

David Chen:

I begin with an inspirational reading from St. Francis de Sales, who wrote about the mystical act of consent.

"Our free will can hinder the course of inspiration. And when the favorable gale of God's grace swells the sails of our soul, it is in our power to refuse consent, and thereby hinder the effect of the wind's favor. But when our spirit sails along and makes its voyage prosperously, it is not we who make the gale of inspiration blow for us. Nor we who make our sails swell with it, nor we who give motion to the ship of our heart, but we simply receive the gale. Consent to its motion and let our ship sail under it, not hindered by our resistance."

My friends, this morning, I would like to share with you my journey consenting to the winds. Or in other words, learning to listen. Or in other words, praying in silence. Of all the changes my body, mind, and soul have witnessed during my college years, my relationship with silence has changed me the most. It was not long ago that I thought silence trivial, a nuisance. A gap to be filled with my actions, thoughts, and doings. Anyone who has been in a Harvard section knows how devastatingly heavy silence can be following a question about the readings that no one did.

But I do not speak of a silence that is simply a lack of sound. I speak of a silence of the mind, of the sound of many voices within us. The monkey at the typewriter, so to speak. There is a Zen proverb that says the bird of paradise lands on the hand that does not grasp. Thoughts are like fists of the mind clenching around an ethereal center. It is not until we still the hand and wait in loving silence that the bird of insight, inspiration, and bliss, may visit our home. My practice of stilling the hand came from my studies in anthropology and meditation. Two words I never would've imagined being central to my college journey. Yet here I am.

Anthropology classically self-identifies to be the study of what makes us human. It attempts to convey the human condition through stories of social worlds. Its method of research is extraordinary, in that it encourages deep hanging out. Being without need for much giving. Slow time spent with others in quiet witnessing.

In my research on palliative care, I spent a lot of time with the people I met in intimate silence, sitting together on bus rides, bumping shoulders, making noodles. In silence, I stood heart-struck at a daughter

walking her Asian father up a flight of stairs. In silence, I sat watching two grandmothers share a laugh on the hospital bed, one naked with an incision scar on her chest. Another with a volunteer shirt on, bifocals bouncing on her neck.

I came to Harvard, like many others, believing that I was admitted to the largest, most esteemed waterfall of wisdom in the world. Thirsty to drink from the waters of knowledge, I surprisingly became disappointed and disillusioned at how little my experiences could quench. In searching for bigger and grander waterfalls of wisdom, love, and joy, I found that it was, in truth, the size of my cup that betrayed my parched lips and not the size of the waterfall. I could be standing next to Niagara Falls itself, but if I have a thimble, a thimble full of water is all I can drink.

Silence in these intimate moments taught me to listen. In listening, my cup expanded as naturally as a flower would bloom. Suddenly, even the tiniest trickle of the ordinary could incite deep feelings of love. The smallest of streams would quench my thirst for wonder and realization. And of course, you can't drink with talking. Being silent in the presence of life's quivering movements is a radical consent to listen. It is to raise the sail of one's heart with faithful knowing that the winds no better where to lead you than you do yourself.

Silence is the language of God, the sound of his guiding voice that rings infinitely across the universe. Silence is God's most precious mercy, a gift of space which allows our lives to speak freely of him to sing until we recognize our nature to be of song itself.

Perhaps the greatest joy of silent listening is to hear the song of love within yourself, singing between each of your heartbeats. As the Bible says, "Be still and know that I am God." Indeed, the space we are in now vibrates with Divine stillness, urging the praying heart to go with Him. With this in mind, I wish to end with a prayer written by Swami Paramahansa Yogananda, a Hindu saint who brought the science of God doing yoga to the U.S. "Oh, beloved God, father of light, mother to my every breath, in the solitude of my mind, I yearn to hear thy voice. Take away the dreams of earthly sounds that yet lurk in my memory. I want to hear thy voice ever singing in the silence of my soul. O divine shepherd of infinite perception, rescue the lambs of my thoughts, lost in the wilderness of restlessness, and lead them into thy fold of silence. I bow to thee, O breath within my breath, in the temple of the skies, in the temple of nature, and in the soul temples of human brothers and sisters." Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

I invite you now please to rise and join in saying the words Jesus taught us.

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.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please join in singing our concluding hymn, number 276. Go Forth for God.

(singing)

Please join us down in the undercroft immediately following the service for refreshments at MemCafé. And if you can, tonight at 5:15 here in the chapel for our final communion service of the term.

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Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation in the church and the Christ Jesus, forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.

(music)