

Amy Sexauer:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Amy Sexauer:

Welcome to Appleton Chapel here in the Memorial Church for our daily service of Morning Prayers. Our guest speaker this morning is Ellen Williams, president of the Kisoro Children's Foundation. I invite you to please rise, if you are able, and join me in reading our responsive psalm, found in your Black Psalter, Psalm 142. "I cry with my voice to the Lord. With my voice, I make supplication to the Lord."

Congregation:

"I pour out my complaint before Him, I tell my trouble before Him."

Amy Sexauer:

"When my spirit is faint, thou knowest my way. In the path where I walk, they have hidden a trap for me."

Congregation:

"I look to the right and watch, but there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me, no man cares for me."

Amy Sexauer:

"I cry to thee, O Lord; I say, 'Thou art my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.'"

Congregation:

"Give heed to my cry; for I am brought very low. Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me."

Amy Sexauer:

"Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to thy name."

Congregation:

"The righteous will surround me; for thou wilt deal bountifully with me."

Amy Sexauer:

You may be seated.

MUSIC:

[Greek 00:03:45].

Ellen K. Williams:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Ellen K. Williams:

Thank you to the choir. It's always so beautiful. I'm going to start with a reading from The Good Book by the Reverend Peter Gomes. "Hope's greatest power is that it enables the present by embracing the future. Hope does not deny the circumstances of the present, and hope doesn't get us out of our difficulties. Hope doesn't get us out, but it does get us through. Hope is not the enterprise of last resort, it is the quality that transcends both failure and success, for it substitutes the ultimate for the temporary. Hope allows us to transcend definition by mere circumstances and appearances."

Charity is a nurse who works with the elderly in the rural villages around Kisoro, Uganda, a community where I've been deeply involved for the last eight years. I remember being so struck by Charity's effusive personality and her melodic, expressive English when I first met her. Her distinct speech is a skill she learned in her childhood home, because her father gathered the family every night to listen to the BBC on their battery-operated radio, believing that a command of English would be a key to a better life. When I met Charity, she was 40 years old, and had already had a lifetime's worth of tragedy. Her husband had died in a car accident, leaving her with two young children. Her older brother and his wife had died of complications of HIV, and their sons were being raised by Charity's older brother, a Catholic priest.

Over the eight years that I have known Charity, the misfortunes have continued to pile up. Her older brother died suddenly, and she inherited the care of the twice-orphaned nephews. She was diagnosed with HIV and began treatment. She remarried, and just 11 months later, her husband died suddenly from severe hypertension. In the years since his death, she has clawed her way back from that loss, trying to provide support in various ways to his three children, her nephews, and her own children. In late September, she developed pneumocystis pneumonia, a complication of poorly-treated HIV infection. And earlier this month, her 17-year-old daughter suddenly lost sight in one eye, apparently from a rare early cataract.

This is a story peppered with illnesses that might've had different outcomes and deaths that might not have happened had people been in the United States. It is also a story that is repeated in various ways over and over in Kisoro. What is remarkable about this particular story is that despite the setbacks and her own illnesses, Charity remains astoundingly cheerful and upbeat, full of hope and optimism, true hope that things will get better, that she will get through the latest setback, and that there will continue to be good, wonderful things everywhere.

Some of Charity's optimism certainly comes from her profound Christian faith. She is truly like Job in her unwavering faith through all adversity. But it is not just faith that gets Charity through. It is joyous, glorious hope. Hope that the children will do well in school, hope that her son will finish medical school, hope that the elders she visits in the villages will enjoy the joyful dance she has planned for them to do together. When she was sick with pneumocystis, she wrote to me, "When I look at my face on my snapped photos, I look so healthy. I know I will be well." Hope is what lifts her up and makes her a light to others. Echoing the words of Reverend Gomes from earlier, it is Charity's hope that allows her to transcend being defined by her circumstances. She has found a way to have a good life, even with all that has occurred.

Reverend Gomes wrote further, "Hope therefore is what connects the present to the future; it is the mother of courage, confidence, and endurance. The good life is not that for which one hopes. Hope is that which makes the good life possible, and thus the good life is not an objective but a consequence." Charity, with her profound hope, is herself the mother of courage, confidence, and endurance. She inspires me to find the courage to cultivate hope when I encounter difficulties. And perhaps more importantly, to strive to cultivate hope in others. She reminds me that hope is not a personality trait, and it is not just optimism, but rather, it is a spiritual practice, a cultivated point of view that is worth striving for even in the darkest, most anxious times, as we all seek to build a good life. For those of you who pray, Charity asks that you keep her in your prayers.

Amy Sexauer:

I invite you, if you are able, to please rise and pray with me. Father in heaven, may we collectively lift up Charity in this moment. May we also lift up to you the prayers and concerns of our heart, because what matters to our hearts matters to you, no matter how big or how small. Help us to speak the language of hope, and to see your light and your joy in the present time in the world around us. In your name, we pray, amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Amy Sexauer:

Let us now pray together the way that Jesus taught. "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, for ever and ever. Amen."

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, for ever and ever. Amen."

Amy Sexauer:

Please join in singing our concluding hymn, number four, For the Beauty of the Earth.

MUSIC:

For the beauty of the earth.

For the beauty of the skies.

For the love which from our birth.

Over and around us lies.

Christ, our Lord, to thee we raise.

This, our hymn of grateful praise.

For the beauty of each hour.

Of the day and of the night.
Hill and vale and tree and flower.
Sun and moon and stars of light.
Christ, our Lord, to thee we raise.
This, our hymn of grateful praise.
For the joy of ear and eye.
For the heart and mind's delight.
For the mystic harmony.
Linking sense to sound and sight.
Christ, our Lord, to thee we raise.
This, our hymn of grateful praise.
For the joy of human love.
Brother, sister, parent, child.
Friends on earth and friends above.
For all gentle thoughts and mild.
Christ, our Lord, to thee we raise.
This, our hymn of grateful praise.
For thy Church, which evermore.
Lifteth holy hands above.
Offering up on every shore.
Her pure sacrifice of love.
Christ, our Lord, to thee we raise.
This, our hymn of grateful praise.

Amy Sexauer:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you always. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Amy Sexauer:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.