

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

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Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to morning prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. Our speaker for this morning is Liza Swedarsky, instructor in obstetrics, gynecology, and reproductive biology at Harvard Medical School, and a licensed spiritual practitioner through the Center for Spiritual Living. Welcome, Liza. Please rise and bow or in spirit for our responsive Psalm, which is number 106 in your black psalter.

Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can shew forth all His praise?

Elizabeth Propst:

Blessed are they that keep judgment and he that doeth righteousness at all times.

Congregation:

Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea.

Elizabeth Propst:

Nevertheless, He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power to be known.

Congregation:

As He remembered them for His covenant, and repented according to the multitude of His mercies.

Elizabeth Propst:

Save us, Oh Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise.

Congregation:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting; and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the Lord.

Dr. Liza Swedarsky MD:

Good morning. What a blessing to be among you in the sacred space. This is a reading from the fourth chapter of Philippians, beginning at the fourth verse. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all, the Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally,

brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put into practice and the God of peace will be with you." And here ends the lesson.

We are not from this beautiful place. We are children of God. Before I wore a white coat that identifies me as a medical doctor, I was a little girl who loved God first, and movies. My African American mother and Jewish father were married in South Bend, Indiana, five years after the landmark Civil Rights case Loving vs Virginia. In 1967, the US Supreme Court unanimously ruled in favor of Richard and Mildred Loving, declaring bans on interracial marriage unconstitutional, and a violation of the 14th Amendment. This landmark case paved the way to end segregation, Jim Crow, and has been foundational to marital equality, and legislation supporting same-sex marriage. The Lovings fought over nine years to legalize their union. They kept their minds on what was right, true, pure, and praiseworthy, love. Knowing Mildred was a Baptist, I imagine she prayed and petitioned God before she had been guided to write Robert F. Kennedy, who referred her to the ACLU.

It was on October 28, 1964, that two volunteer ACLU attorneys, Bernard Cohen, and Philip Hirschkop, both Jewish, filed a federal class action lawsuit, propelling the Lovings case all the way to the Supreme Court. And 10 years later, on the exact same date, October 28th, I was born. If it were not for the Lovings' courage, my parents would've been felons in certain states and I may not exist in my current form. Alabama was the last state to repeal its laws against interracial marriage in the year 2000, and 25 of the 67 counties in Alabama voted against the repeal. The Lovings' fight was against diseased unpure thought forms. As a doctor, I feel like I can say that, and particularly a doctor who loves God. I define disease or dis-ease as a particular quality, habit, or disposition, regarded as adversely affecting a person or a group of people. See, I was prepared early to withstand the energy of what is required to be on the front line, facing and co-experiencing the disease in others.

I was prepared as a child, witnessing the disapproving faces, feeling energies unlike love, and hearing comments when my parents entered spaces with their five mixed race children, and I give gratitude for all of it. A week ago today, on March 15th, my father Leonard Swedarsky would've celebrated his 74th birthday. He transitioned in 2021 from fear, anger, and depression that showed up as dis-ease in his body as a diagnosis of an autoimmune condition that prevented him from eating food. The truth is, he exercised his power of choice and wanted to leave this place. See, my father never knew that God was near to him while he existed in this third dimensional realm, and as his daughter, his intuitive daughter, I don't have proof, but I would put my hand in fire knowing that somewhere along the way, his inner child experienced the thing so painful that it caused him to forget who he was.

I can often see inner child in the people that I meet. Although my mother inspired me to know and love God first, it was my father's inner child who watched movies with my own. Although his favorite film was It's A Wonderful Life, and as a Jewish man, he loved Christmas. His inner child hurt and yearned for freedom, and he celebrated life through film. It's no wonder I guess, that my 18-year-old daughter is filming her first movie as we speak. I return every year to my favorite film, the Curious Case of Benjamin Button, adapted from F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story of the same name. We meet Queenie in 1918, a faith filled black woman who finds Benjamin wrapped in a dirty blanket on her doorstep of a nursing home that she oversees. Benjamin is prematurely old. Instead of growing old, he grows young. As a baby, Queenie sees him and gasps. She pauses, and then she says, "The Lord done something here."

Within seconds, she scoops him up and raises him as her own because secretly she'd been praying and petitioning for her own baby. We experienced his first healing through the gaze of a pastor who recognizes optimism in Benjamin's heart and calls out faith that he sees in Benjamin's soul. And although Benjamin is wheelchair bound and appears 80, he's only seven. The pastor reminds the

congregation that we are all children in the eyes of God and speaks, "In the name of God's glory, rise up," commanding Benjamin to walk as they are both situated in front of the sign that reads "Healing Through Faith." Benjamin Button grows older, grows younger on the outside, and expands wiser in consciousness on the inside. He was never anxious about abandonment, illness, war loss, or grief because he was loved early on as a white, seemingly diseased baby by a black woman who he called mother. So we must ask ourselves, how do we survive and thrive in this place in all its glory and beauty, juxtaposed with war, violence, separation, sickness, but most of all, dis-eased thought forms that penetrate our society and the entire world, like viruses?"

We rejoice in God. We know who we are. Benjamin's final words of advice to his daughter, allow me to know that he and Apostle Paul would've been great friends if Benjamin had been real and lived in that time. He writes to her as he approaches the end of his circle of life, "For what it's worth, it's never too late, or in my case, too early to be whoever you want to be. There is no time limit. Stop whenever you want. You can change or stay the same. There are no rules to this thing. We can make the best or the worst of it. I hope you make the best of it, and I hope you see things that startle you. I hope you feel things you've never felt before. I hope you meet people with a different point of view. I hope you live a life that you're proud of. If you find that you're not, I hope you have the strength to start over again."

So I invite each one here to bow our heads for a short prayer, and as we breathe deeply in the energy of love, knowing that we are children of God first. My prayer for each one here today is that you know who you are. That you know in the depths of your soul, that the godchild inside of you was never touched, hurt, bruised, abandoned, broken, or minimized, by anything encountered in this place or any decision or action you have made. My prayer is a rejoicing heart for each one here, rejoicing in God, the God within, and the God that created everything in love. Let us open to know peace through God's grace. Let us honor the intuitive feeling heart within each one of us. It knows at all times that God is near and here. I speak my word, knowing that each one here and each one listening beyond knows that you are one with the heart, mind, and soul of God, and that your inner child is safe, seen, known, and loved.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please rise and bow or in spirit for the Lord's Prayer. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as 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 join in our closing hymn, God Is My Strong Salvation, Number 278.

Just a reminder that we are coming up on Holy Week in this church, beginning with Palm Sunday this Sunday. So please check our website for the many, many services that we'll be running. We'd love to have you at any and all of them. Remember today that Christ has no hands in this world but yours, no voice but yours. So may our hands and our voices do the work of justice and of love today and always. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.