

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning is Katie O'Dair, University Marshall here at Harvard University. Please rise in body or in spirit for our responsive Psalm, which is number 45 in your black psalter.

My heart is stirring with a noble song. Let me recite what I have fashioned for the king, my tongue shall be the pen of a skilled writer.

Congregation:

You are the fairest of men; grace flows from your lips, because God has blessed you for ever.

Elizabeth Propst:

Strap your sword upon your thigh, O mighty warrior, in your pride and in your majesty.

Congregation:

Ride out and conquer in the cause of truth and for the sake of justice.

Elizabeth Propst:

Your right hand will show you marvelous things; your arrows are very sharp, O mighty warrior.

Congregation:

The peoples are falling at your feet, and the king's enemies are losing heart.

Elizabeth Propst:

Your throne, O God, endures for ever and ever, a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your realm; you love righteousness and hate iniquity.

Congregation:

Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions.

(singing)

Katie O'Dair:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Katie O'Dair:

I am going to start with a poem entitled The Swimming Lesson by Mary Oliver.

"Feeling the icy kick, the endless waves reaching around my life, I moved my arms and coughed, and in the end saw land. Somebody, I suppose, remembering the medieval maxim had tossed me in, had wanted me to learn to swim. Not knowing that none of us, who ever came back from that long lonely fall and frenzied rising, ever learned anything at all about swimming, but only how to put off, one by one, dreams and pity, love and grace, how to survive in any place."

A happy Monday to all of you, and thank you for being here. A special thanks to the choir for always starting the day so beautifully. I'm still amazed that you get up every day so early, and you look so bright, and it's really amazing. As a swimmer, I have always been drawn to the water. And the poem I shared is one of my favorites by Mary Oliver.

Her words remind us that, at times, life tosses us into the deep end, and we must not only find our way back to shore to survive, but figure out a way to thrive. I must warn you, I plan to swim in metaphors during this brief dive into positivity, so bear with me.

Now, as a card carrying member of the glass is half full club, I find comfort in my favorite saying, the best is yet to come, especially during challenging times. While our outlook on life is often shaped by, among other things, biology, environment, circumstance, and the people around us, it can serve as a compass. For much of my life I have been a future gazer; always peering around corners, fixated on the horizon, eager to discern the next chapter. Change the unknown and the messy beauty of tomorrow have always excited me.

Recently, a wise colleague shared with me a quote from the Dalai Lama that challenge this perspective. And I quote, "There are only two days in the year that nothing can be done. One is called yesterday, the other is called tomorrow. Today is the right day to love, believe, do, and mostly live." It's a paradox I grapple with. How to reconcile these contrasting views?

Yet, life has a way of redirecting our gaze to the present. Forcing us to confront the now, whether it's a health challenge, a job change, or family situation. The Dalai Lama encourages us to be present for all of it. To savor today's moments and the people in our lives, and to believe that you can do much in the now. Staying in the moment can sometimes be a struggle for me, but perhaps it's a delicate balance, appreciating the present while keeping an eye on the future.

Think for a moment about the qualities of the people who you love to spend time with. Your list likely includes traits you see in yourself, and qualities you don't possess but deeply appreciate in others. I have always been drawn to people who are fully present in the moment. People who instinctively understand that what matters most is what you are doing right now. Honesty is a trait I also value, and my family and friends have kindly reminded me when I have metaphorically left the building mentally. We're never too old to learn, and I find myself recalibrating lately. Not just because I have the time, but because I'm less eager to peer around the corner.

Last December, I was rushing across campus to a meeting that, at the time, felt like the most important thing in the world, when I saw a colleague who I have not seen in a while. When I asked how she was doing, rather than the usual response, "Oh good, how are you?", there was a hesitation. And I instantly knew that it was more important to be present in that moment than at whatever meeting I was headed to.

Indeed, she was not okay, and taking time to be fully present was exactly what was needed in the moment. But I wonder how many times I have missed those moments? Perhaps you can ask yourself if you have missed those as well.

Shifting the balance to appreciating the now might mean planting seeds for trees that will give shade in the future, or it might not, and that's okay. Today, in this beautiful space within this supportive community, let's collectively calm our minds and hearts, appreciating the gifts of the present. Perhaps try to notice more of what is around you, or stay a bit longer in a conversation. So, while I still believe that the best is yet to come, I will add an asterisk, and believe that the place Mary Oliver is referring to is today. And I wish you a wonderful one.

Elizabeth Propst:

Will you join me in prayer? Holy one, as always, we find ourselves pulled in a thousand different directions. We want to grieve and give thanks for the past. We want to look towards the future. We want to honor the now. Help us live across these different conflicting scales. Help us give each moment the time and the care that it deserves. Help us to be with other people as they navigate this same ambiguity. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please rise in body or in spirit for the Lord's prayer.

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.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please join in our closing hymn, number 23 in your Crimson hymnal.

(singing)

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.