

Steph Grossano:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Steph Grossano:

And welcome to Morning Prayers here at Appleton Chapel. We're grateful that our speaker this morning is Kyra Fiber. She's a senior in Currier House. Welcome.

Our service today will begin with a responsive reading of Psalm 121, found in your black Appleton Psalter book. Please rise in body or spirit as we read the Psalm responsively by whole verse.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

Congregation:

My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.

Steph Grossano:

He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

Congregation:

Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

Steph Grossano:

The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.

Congregation:

The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

Steph Grossano:

The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.

Congregation:

The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

Steph Grossano:

Please be seated.

(singing)

Kyra Fiber:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Kyra Fiber:

I'd like to start by thanking the Memorial Church for having me today, and for my friend Elizabeth, for inviting me to speak about my experience for the past four years.

Now, I'm not deeply familiar with much literature, but following with tradition, I'd like to start with a very brief quote from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. "Omnia mutantur, nihil interit." Everything changes nothing perishes.

I'm a tea person. Five years ago, I had the task of writing a college essay to try to portray myself and how I changed throughout high school. There was a lot I wanted to say, but to avoid my essay becoming a sappy, ranting mess, I likened my life to that of a teabag. Tea leaves are raised gently and lovingly in the slopes of mountains, my childhood. Then they're broken into pieces during production by my chosen antagonist, Lipton. This was the death of my mother, the addiction of my father, and the loss of the life I knew. Finally, the tea is redeemed. Coming together at last into a finished product, a teabag. If I'm trusting the words of my sixteen-year-old self, I believed I too was a finished product. I had gone through the worst I would likely experience in my lifetime and had learned and evolved from it.

When I was invited to speak today, my friend Katie encouraged me to try to analyze my experiences at Harvard in a similar way that I had in my college essay. With the possibility of taking her advice too literally, I'm going to keep talking about tea.

The dried tea leaves are not yet the finished product. They still must be steeped and drunk. There's room yet for challenges. Steep the leaves too hot and they'll scorch, and your drink will turn bitter. Steep the leaves too long and the astringent taste will ruin your brew.

Harvard is a pressure cooker. Everyone here is boiling over all the time. Ambition and ego permeate every aspect of the culture here, leading students to overcommit and take everything a little too seriously. I was the same. Although I admit, my freshman year during COVID was more of a cold brew, I jumped into my sophomore year replicating what everyone else did. I took five classes, taught one, had two jobs, applied for more clubs than you can count, all while attempting to have a social life and get a few hours of sleep here and there. We all talk to one another and compete for who has the most on their plate, not realizing we're all boiling over. I burned myself in the heat, becoming more bitter than I could even imagine.

Because Harvard pushes you to be the best, it's also easy to stay within your comfort zone. My leaves unfurled. I started to relax into my studies. I took classes in my field. I did the same jobs, and I succeeded in them. I could barely see that steeping longer in the things I was good at wasn't making me any better. It was making me bored, tired, and bitter too.

Halfway through my sophomore year, I saw the consequences of steeping too hot for too long. I needed the tea basket to be lifted from the water and moved from the steamy fog of the bubbling, boiling trap of Harvard. I like to think my friends and my family are that basket. Holding all my leaves together, allowing me to stretch and breathe without straying too far. Rescuing me when I start to go bitter. I transformed completely, and learned how to master that first steep. Sometimes all it takes is a new perspective. I found that you can stay within your comfort zone while still doing new things. I followed new interests and took classes I knew I'd learned from. I taught calculus for six semesters, but taught all different courses, stored with new people and subjects. I kept my jobs, but started volunteering my time to feel the passion and excitement of giving my all to something meaningful. It's almost as if I found the perfect teapot and seasoned it to my taste. Making every brew better and better with time, adding complexity and richness to the flavors I already knew.

Harvard has given me the opportunity to explore and find experiences that will change me as a person. Everything I've done during my time has taught me something new about myself and about what I'm looking for in life. I came here thinking I knew everything about who I was. I liked neuroscience and math, now I explore other subjects. I would never drink alcohol, now I'm on the board of a wine society. I would go straight through to medical school, now I'm taking two years away to make my world even bigger. The stiff dry tea leaves that were my stubborn mind almost prevented me from growing, but the people I met here opened me up to new things.

This summer, I'm co-directing a homeless shelter, something I never imagined I would do. Next year, I'm moving to France to commit to service and teaching out in the world. When I came here thinking I was a finished product, I didn't realize how much more I had to grow. Now I understand that I'm only at the beginning of my journey. I leave Harvard next month knowing I found the balance between ambition and comfort, heat and time, to make these four years the perfect first steep. Although, as all tea lovers in the audience know, it's the second steep that's the best one. Thank you.

Steph Grossano:

Will you pray with me? God of change, sometimes we mistake busyness for belovedness. We chase our belovedness trying to find the things that will make us feel ambitious and successful. We know that you've given each of us a divine purpose, and we are grateful for the ways you help us grow and change into that purpose. Help us to find the people along the way that remind us that no matter what we do, no matter where we go, we are loved. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Steph Grossano:

And together, let us pray as Jesus taught his disciples.

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.

Steph Grossano:

Please rise in body or spirit as we sing hymn number 40, Morning Has Broken, in your Crimson Harvard hymnal.

(singing)

As we go into this day, may we remember that in the goodness of God, we were born into this world. By the grace of God, we have been kept all the day long, even unto this very hour. And by the love of God, we are being made whole. Go in peace.