

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning. Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton chapel. Our speaker this morning is Madeline Bugeau-Heartt, a third year master of divinity candidate at Harvard Divinity School. Welcome, Madeline. Please rise in body or in spirit for our responsive Psalm, which is number 111 in your black salter.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt:

I will praise the Lord with my whole heart in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation.

Congregatioun:

The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt:

His work is honorable and glorious and His righteousness endureth forever.

Congregatioun:

He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt:

He has given meat unto them that fear Him. He will ever be mindful of His covenant.

Congregatioun:

He hath shewed His people the power of His works, that He may give them the heritage of the heathen.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt:

The works of His hands are verity and judgment. All his commandments are sure.

Congregatioun:

They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness.

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt:

He sent redemption unto His people. He hath commanded His covenant forever. Holy and reverend is His name.

Congregatioun:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, a good understanding have all they that do His commandments. His praise endureth for ever. (Singing.)

Madeline Bugeau-Heartt:

Good Morning. Good morning. That was so beautiful. Thank you. I'd like to start with a quote from writer Ann Lamont. She says, "I really believe that God's idea of a good time is to see us sharing what we have worked so hard to have or to see us flirting with that old guy in line at the health food store telling him our grandfather had a hat just like that, even though that is a lie." Today I want to talk to you about

flirting. Now, I don't mean flirting as making googly eyes at that cutie pie across the room, though that is perfectly acceptable. What I want to offer to you all this morning is an idea of flirting as a spiritual practice, flirting as an effort to see other people for their inherent humanity and to engage with this humanity from a posture of delight and warmth. About six years ago, I was living at home in order to help take care of my grandmother who was in her last year of decline of Alzheimer's. This was a blessed time in many ways and extremely impactful, but it was also quite challenging.

This was supposed to be a light sermon. I began to, but it's true, lose myself in a tunnel of despair that came in not being able to help someone I loved so much, even though I knew she was suffering. During this time, I would regularly go to a local yoga studio to move my body and to get out of the house. I would slink in, full of sadness, practice and then leave. I didn't engage much with anyone. One night as I was leaving, one of the teachers whose name was Bill, passed me on the stairs and said, "You have a good weekend now Madeline." And then he winked at me and I snapped to focus. I had no idea that he even knew my name and the wink was friendly, marry and conspiratorial, not unwanted. Through the fog of my despair someone had, without asking for anything in return, seen me. This micro moment which cost him nothing, felt like a hand pulling me out of sunken waters.

I recount this tale to illustrate that you never know what people are going through, nor how such a small act of kindness might serve as another's salvation. The reality is that many of us are not flirted with or seen at all in our daily lives. The inner light we each possess, that most precious thing that makes you, you, gets covered with layers of sediment, with life's dust, the more we are ignored. What can we do then in every encounter we have today, whether it be with the bus driver or your in-law, or someone passing you on the street, even with yourself to gently and kindly dust off that precious light within to say through action, "I see you. You mean something. I'm glad that you are here. You are wanted in the world."

Writer Alam deBotin is helpful, I think, when he says, "If you think of flirtation, of what flirtation is, in many ways, flirtation is an attempt to awaken somebody else to their attractiveness. I think it would be a pity if we had to drive something as important as validation and self-acceptance and a pleasant view of oneself into the rather narrow gate of sex. Flirtation is a kind of act of the imagination, and what's fun about flirtation is that it often happens between really quite unlikely people. It's about two people delighting in the awakening of one another." How can we exercise this particular imagination? Who comes to mind when you think of someone who could use such an act of validation? The charge I offer you today is to experiment with this notion of flirting, whether it be with a smile or a compliment like, "I just love your brooch," or a la Bill, a conspiratorial wink to hold lightly and with generosity of spirit, this opportunity to help others feel seen and awakened, if just for a passing moment.

And I'd like to offer us a prayer. Oh, great mystery. May we possess the willingness to see one another's inherent life within. May we possess the necessary imagination to find creative and kind ways of reaching out, and may we find the courage to let ourselves be seen. Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please rise, in body or in spirit, for the Lord's prayer. 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 to 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, There's a Wideness in God's Mercy. Number 231. (Singing.) Christ has no hands in this world but yours, no voice but yours, so may our hands and our voices and our conspiratorial winks do the work of God's justice and God's love today and always. Amen.

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Congregatiuon:

Amen.