

Harriett Lineman:

Good morning. Welcome to morning prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Sharon Christner, a master of divinity candidate at HDS. Welcome. Please rise in body or in spirit for responsive reading of Psalm 77, found in your black Appleton Psalter Book. I cry aloud to God, aloud to God that he may hear me.

Congregation:

In the day of my trouble, I seek the Lord. In the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; My soul refuses to be comforted.

Harriett Lineman:

I think of God and I moan. I meditate and my spirit faints.

Congregation:

Thou dost hold my eyelids from closing; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

Harriett Lineman:

I consider the days of old. I remember the years long ago.

Congregation:

I commune with my heart through the night. I meditate and search my spirits.

Harriett Lineman:

Will the Lord spurned forever and never again be favorable?

Congregation:

Has His love forever ceased? Are His promises at the end for all time?

Harriett Lineman:

Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His compassion?

Congregation:

And I say, "it is my grief that the right hand on the most high has changed.

Harriett Lineman:

I'll call to mind the deeds of the Lord. Yay, I will remember thy wonders of old.

Congregation:

I will meditate on all thy work, and muse on thy mighty deeds.

Sharon Christner:

Good morning y'all. Here's an excerpt from the Vision of [inaudible 00:08:09]. She writes, when we are all brought up to heaven, we shall see clearly in God's secrets that are now hidden from us. None of us

will want to say, then, Lord, if only it had happened in this way or that, it would've been perfectly all right. Perfectly all right, imagine perfectly all right. I'm used to imagining perfection and maybe you are too. In terms of things like the graded exam, the tightrope walk, archery, bowling, the 4.0, perfect attendance, infinite days without an incident. Perfection usually appears to us in approximately one dimension, it's yes or no. You've done it perfectly the whole time or you haven't. It's precarious. If you make a mistake, perfection is no longer attainable. And while things might still end up fine, there's no way back. It's a diminished day.

So when we imagine what a perfect being would be like, maybe what God would be like, we might think of this harsh, narrow protection of one dimension approaching zero dimensions, a disembodied singularity of infinite precision, completely untouchable and approachable at best, only asymptotically. Something so perfect, it almost has no properties. We look up at this kind of perfection with an anxious awe. If God's like that, what happens to me? What happens to us non-perfect people and the smashed and bent things that we do and cannot undo? Perfection must be a great heavy judging eye on our backs as we look longingly into a garden we can't access.

I'll appeal to some medieval friends for help here. There's a song called Adam lay ybounden, and it sings about Adam and Eve, and they're wrongly taking the apple. But it hints at a surprising reversal. If never had one apple taken been, then had never our lady been heaven's queen. Blessed be the time the apple taking was. Therefore, we may sing Deo gracias. Apparently God can take the eating of the apple, the fall of humanity, and make from it a reason for saying thank God and dancing the [inaudible 00:10:47].

According to Julian, who we heard from earlier, when God witnesses our falling and suffering, he thinks this. Here is my servant whom I love, what hurt and discomfort he has known. Ought I not to give him something that will more than compensate him and indeed be even more worth having than his own previous health? This much beloved servant should be truly and gladly rewarded beyond anything he could have had had he not fallen. Yes, indeed further, his fall and subsequent suffering were to be transformed into great and superlative honor and everlasting joy.

This deep compassion and the genius ability to rig up something good out of terrible materials, points to a different kind of perfection entirely. And this is how I think about it. The best woodworker is not the one who can saw a perfectly precise square out of top quality wood and the best possible tools. The best woodworker is the one who can make a beautiful artistic piece of furniture using the wood that someone threw out from an old fence and four or five tools that happened to be in the garage. The best cook is not the one who can make a gourmet meal out of premium, hand-picked produce, but the one who can do it even with dollar [inaudible 00:12:08] ingredients and a hot plate. The best mechanic, inventor, parent, nurse isn't the one who can do something perfect, but only with perfect materials and circumstances. No, the thickest skill is shown in what they can do with wonky, broken, brand new stuff. And in the very most wonderful stories, something is made that turns out better than if it had not been messed up in the first place.

Here we see perfection in multiple dimensions, the kind of perfection that not only accomplishes its goal, but also can more than make up for any problems in its medium. God is a perfectionist, so dimensional that it can surround, embrace, outdo, and more than make up for the imperfections in His way. He's the good kind of perfect. And can make things better than if they had never gone wrong.

Let's pray. Lord, you find us here in the yard, in high midterm season, and many of us are feeling the pinch of perfection and the dread of getting something wrong. More pressing Lord, there is war and things have gone horribly wrong in a way that does not seem redeemable or reversible. Give us the assurance that you are doing good things that we cannot see, that you will make things more than right and that you will be with us every day until then, amen.

Harriett Lineman:

Please rise in body or in spirit. And now let us pray as Jesus taught saying, our Father.

Congregation:

Our Father.

Harriett Lineman:

Who art in heaven.

Congregation:

Who art in heaven.

Harriett Lineman:

Hallowed be thy name.

Congregation:

Hallowed be thy name.

Harriett Lineman:

Thy Kingdom come.

Congregation:

Thy Kingdom come.

Harriett Lineman:

Thy will be done.

Congregation:

Thy will be done.

Harriett Lineman:

On earth as it is in heaven.

Congregation:

On earth as it is in heaven.

Harriett Lineman:

Give us this day.

Congregation:

Give us this day.

Harriett Lineman:

Our daily bread.

Congregation:

Our daily bread.

Harriett Lineman:

And forgive us our trespasses.

Congregation:

And forgive us our trespasses.

Harriett Lineman:

As we forgive those who trespassed against us.

Congregation:

As we forgive those who trespassed against us.

Harriett Lineman:

And lead us not into temptation.

Congregation:

And lead us not into temptation.

Harriett Lineman:

But deliver us from evil.

Congregation:

But deliver us from evil.

Harriett Lineman:

For thine is the Kingdom.

Congregation:

For thine is the Kingdom.

Harriett Lineman:

And the power and the glory.

Congregation:

And the power and the glory.

Harriett Lineman:

Forever and ever.

Congregation:

Forever and ever.

Harriett Lineman:

Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Harriett Lineman:

Let us sing the hymn we sing of God the mighty source. Number 10.

And now as we leave this place, the peace of God be in your heart, the love of God be in your hands, the joy of God be in your soul. Go in peace. Amen.