

Harriet Lindeman:

Good morning.

Speaker 2:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Harriet Lindeman:

And welcome to Morning Prayers at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Dean Rakesh Khurana, professor of sociology, Marvin Bauer, professor of leadership development and dean of Harvard College. Welcome. If you are able, please stand for our responsive reading, Psalm 80, found in your black psalter. Hear, oh thou Shepherd of Israel, thou that lead us Joseph like a sheep, show thyself also thou that sittest upon the cherubims.

Congregation:

Before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up your strength and and power to help us.

Harriet Lindeman:

Turn us again, oh God. Show the light of thy countenance and we shall be whole.

Congregation:

Oh Lord, God of hosts, how long will thou be angry with thy people that prayeth?

Harriet Lindeman:

Thou feedest them with the bread of tears and givest them plentiestness of tears to drink.

Congregation:

Thou has made us very strife unto our neighbors, and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

Harriet Lindeman:

Turn us again, thou God of hosts. Show the light of thy countenance and we shall be whole.

Congregation:

Thou has brought a vine out of Egypt. Thou has [inaudible 00:02:49] out of Eden and planted it.

Harriet Lindeman:

Turn thee again, thou God of hosts. Look down from heaven, behold and visit this vine.

Congregation:

Turn us again, oh Lord God of hosts. Show the light of your countenance and we shall be whole.

Harriet Lindeman:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing)

Rakesh Khurana:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Rakesh Khurana:

Many Harvard College undergraduates and staff have grown accustomed to hearing me recite the mission of Harvard College, which emphasizes Harvard's role in educating citizens and citizen leaders for our society. While I state our mission regularly, I don't always have an opportunity to delve into what it means to be a citizen or citizen leader. Tomorrow, I'll be traveling out of the country. Because this is my first international trip since the pandemic began, I had to ensure my passport was up to date. I first received my US passport and American citizenship when I was 29. Before that, I was an Indian citizen.

See, my parents immigrated to the United States when I was a toddler. For many years, I was very self-conscious about my non-US citizenship status. Living in New York City as part of the early immigration way in the 1970s, I'd often get the question, "Where are you from?" To mess with people, I would say Queens, but I knew what prompted them to ask the question. They looked at me and assumed I was not an American. I felt American, but people kept reminding me that I wasn't.

I remember noticing how often politicians in the 1980s described Americans not as citizens, but as taxpayers. To refer to citizens as taxpayers emphasizes the idea of citizens as consumers. Am I getting what I'm paying for or am I paying for stuff I don't want or for people I believe are not deserving? The president and many political leaders in the eighties and nineties talked about how government was not the solution to our problems, but rather it was the problem, that we didn't need so much of it. We didn't need civic institutions like unions, and we didn't need to spend money on public schools. We were told that social assistance programs were actually a disservice to the people they were designed to help. Life within this vision of citizenship was a Darwinian struggle, crude, combative, and individualistic.

Back then, popular culture featured shows like Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous and movies like Wall Street in which the famous line, "Greed is good," seemed to turn vice into a virtue. Meanwhile, politicians advanced the idea of trickle down economics to justify the growing inequality in society and dismissed the notion that society could make any claims on its members. Indeed, the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once claimed there was no such thing as society, just individuals.

So as my family moved through the long process from immigrant to green card holders to citizens, I was learning about the market economy, the importance of every individual fighting for their own interests, the push for deregulation.

even those institutions where you would expect moral idea of citizenship would be clearest emphasized the individual. The Army recruitment ads I saw growing up had a tagline, "Be all you can be." There was no further explanation for what moral imperative or social purpose or why one should serve other than for one's own interest. It felt like a paradox at the time to be walking with my family in the path towards citizenship that we had deeply yearned for in a society that seemed to prioritize the individual over shared responsibilities.

I've been thinking about this paradox lately when I think about the mission of Harvard College with its emphasis on educating citizens and citizen leaders. On the one hand, I know that we're deeply invested in the mission of launching our students on a path toward becoming citizens, and citizen leaders for our society. On the other hand, I'm aware that we're living in a society that seems to be moving further away from a shared understanding of citizenship and a society that increasingly talks about education in a way that reminds me of those politicians from the eighties as something not vital for democracy or citizenship, but rather only as a means to an end, a financial investment, a way of preparing students for jobs to be successful and influential.

In a democracy, education is vital for citizenship. In the United States, The relationship between education and citizenship goes back to the nation's founding and the Northwest Ordinance, which set aside resources for public primary education and was then expanded by Lincoln creating the land grant public universities. It goes back to the founding of Harvard College, which recognized that a good society must, "Advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity," and to 1945 when Harvard College argued that its education was preparation for citizenship. And indeed there are many engaged citizens and citizen leaders on this campus. They are in ROTC, they are registering voters, working in shelters and helping recent immigrants navigate our complex immigration system.

We also spend a lot of time on this campus talking about rights and freedoms. These are important conversations, especially when it feels that even the right to vote is not fully secured, but if Harvard is to educate true citizens and citizen leaders, we must engage in a dialogue not just about our rights, but also about our responsibilities as citizens. To do that, we need to talk more about what we mean by citizenship. What are citizenship behaviors? What do we owe our society and each other, and how do we reconcile our answers to these questions with our definitions of successful, influential, and elite?

In our winner take all society, which has now one of the highest levels of inequality among the advanced economies, it can feel odd and out of sync to talk about these things, things like virtue, the good society, civic values, even here on our campus. After all, we've heard a lot about the divisions in our society and the erosion of our sense of community over these past few years, but this seeming de-evolution in our sense of community is exactly why this is the right time to talk about these things. We must talk about the importance of looking out not just for ourselves, but our friends, neighbors and the strangers all around us. We cannot sustain our society without having to sacrifice something, whether it is paying taxes or making changes to keep others safe. Living in a society where the unfortunate are seen as deserving of their lot or where we believe that it costs too much to help them is hurting us in profound ways.

It is understandable that so many of us feel as though the diminishing sense of citizenship across our country is a structural problem far too great for any of us to solve, and that we have more pressing problems in front of us in our own lives, but we can't afford to feel that way. The great fallacy that was perpetuated when I was growing up, that a nation and society only requires its members to act as consumers rather than citizens is bringing our democracy to its knees.

It's easy to say that the mission of Harvard College is to educate the citizens and citizen leaders for our society, and it's easy to talk about our success in educating leaders about how many graduates go on to be leaders in their field. It's harder and more complicated to talk about what we mean by citizenship and whether the leaders who graduate from Harvard are becoming responsible citizen leaders. We need to talk more about the sacrifices that might require of less in higher education if we're really to educate for citizenship. Maybe the time has come to treat the understanding of responsible citizenship as a requirement and not merely as an elective for what it means to be educated.

I was lucky to become a US citizen when I was 29 and to receive my first passport. My naturalization ceremony took place in Faneuil Hall, the site where the call for independence was first heard. The judge who swore us in told us that while freedom and equality had not been fully achieved in the United States, the fact that so many of us had come from places so far away and had come to the United States meant that we had the responsibility to contribute to a better America. I took those words seriously and I think about them often. When I talk about the mission of Harvard College, it's not just an exercise in nostalgia. I'm reminding myself to recommit to that mission as citizens is not just to say the words, but to awaken the acts of citizenship and of citizen leadership: voting, informing ourselves about important community, national and global issues, recognizing the responsibilities we have to our communities and nations, educating citizens and citizen leaders and activist citizens and citizen leaders is how we will ensure that we are not the generation that let this great experiment and we the people fail.

Harriet Lindeman:

If you are able, please rise as we join in prayer. Oh God of grace, we thank you for bringing us together this morning, where we may slow down to breathe and sing and listen. May we open our hearts and minds as we receive the words shared with us. And now, let us recite the words Jesus taught us.

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 to temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Harriet Lindeman:

Let us sing the hymn This Is My Song, O God of All Nations, number 29.

Congregation/Choir
(singing)

Harriet Lindeman:

This transcript was exported on Sep 16, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Oh God of all nations and all peoples, be with us and keep us in peace until we meet again. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.