

Harriet Lindeman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Harriet Lindeman:

Welcome to morning prayers at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Reverend Dr. Monica Sanford, Assistant Dean for Multireligious Ministry at the Divinity School. Welcome.

Harriet Lindeman:

Please rise in body or in spirit for our responsive reading Psalm 145 found in your black psalter.

Harriet Lindeman:

I will exalt You, O Holy God, and bless Your name forever and ever.

Congregation:

Every day will I bless you and praise your name forever and ever.

Harriet Lindeman:

Great are you, O God, and greatly to be praised. There is no end to your greatness.

Congregation:

One generation shall praise your works to another and shall declare your power.

Harriet Lindeman:

I will ponder the glorious splendor of your majesty and all your marvelous works.

Congregation:

You uphold all those who fall. You lift up those who are bowed down.

Harriet Lindeman:

The eyes of all wait upon you, O God, and you give them their food in due season.

Congregation:

You open wide your hand and satisfy the needs of every living creature.

Harriet Lindeman:

You are righteous in all your works and loving in all your ways.

Congregation:

You are near to those who call upon you, to all who call upon you faithfully.

Harriet Lindeman:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(Singing)

Monica Sanford:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Monica Sanford:

Thank you for that kind introduction, Harriet. What a strange thing to find myself here. Not for you, maybe, but certainly for me. How unexpected. Turn it up? Is that better?

I've been thinking about expectations. Expectations that others have for us and expectations we have for others and expectations we have for ourselves. My parents certainly never expected to hear that their daughter would be offering the morning prayer at Memorial Church in Harvard Yard. They likely didn't expect it from their indifferent child who would rather sleep through Sunday Methodist services. They certainly didn't expect it from their rebellious teenager who announced that she was never going back to church again. And they didn't expect it from their adult daughter when she told them she was going to California to become a Buddhist chaplain. And yet here I am unexpected.

As Harvard Divinity School has begun to collectively reflect on the President's report on the legacy of slavery and the work of the Human Remains Return Committee, I've been thinking about the expectations of Harvard's founders. The founders of this school certainly never expected to see such a diverse audience arriving for morning prayers today. And yet here you are, unexpected, and isn't that such good news?

Many of you may feel as I once did, the weight of expectations. Our society expects things of us. Our school expects things of us. Our parents certainly expect things of us. We even expect many of these things of ourselves. We strive to live up to so many expectations.

I am not a parent, but I am a teacher. And as a teacher, I am most proud of my students. Not when they meet my expectations or even when they exceed them, but when they go beyond them. When they take the meager crumbs of knowledge and skills that are all I have to offer, combine them with their own ingredients and turn them into feasts fit to feed the multitudes. I could never have expected that, because what I expect is so very limited: limited by my experiences, limited by my culture and language, limited by my imagination. And I am glad to report that my students are not so limited. We are not so limited by anyone else's expectations, nor even by our own expectations.

Many of the great heroes of our religious and philosophical traditions are men and women who refuse to be limited by expectations. Moses, Jesus, Socrates, Rama, Muhammad, Prajapati. The Buddha in his time was a prince and expected to rule over his nation as a great king. Instead, when confronted by the suffering of the world, he left his palace, cut his hair, donned in ascetic's robe, and sought enlightenment.

At Harvard Divinity School, we take our ideals from the most unexpected figures in human history, not because we expect to live up to them. Wouldn't that be nice? But because we draw from them the courage to be unexpected in our own time. Let us be unexpected. Let us rise to the challenges of our time to ending racism, sexism, and bigotry in all its forms. To working for a just world at peace. To redress the challenges for climate change that is even now bearing down on the people of Florida and the southern states. These challenges require more imagination and ingenuity than anyone now can expect.

So I'm here to ask you to have the courage to be unexpected and to welcome the unexpected into your lives when presented by others. May we all be so blessedly unexpected.

I leave you with the words of the Buddha from the Majjhima Nikāya, chapter 131 of the Pali canon. You shouldn't chase after the past or place expectations on the future. What is past is left behind. The future is as yet unreached. Whatever quality is present, you clearly see right there, right there. Not taken in unshaken. That's how you develop the heart, ardently doing what should be done today. For who knows tomorrow, death. There is no bargaining with mortality and his mighty board. Whoever lives thus ardently, relentlessly, both day and night, has truly had an auspicious day. So says the peaceful sage. Thank you.

Harriet Lindeman:

Please rise, in body and in spirit as we join a prayer. O God of grace, be with us on this day that you have made. May we open our hearts and minds as we reflect on the words shared with us and work towards just world together. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Harriet Lindeman:

And now let us pray the words Jesus taught us. 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.

Harriet Lindeman:

And now, let us join in the hymn Morning Has Broken, number 40.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing)

Harriet Lindeman:

As we prepare to leave this place, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Go in peace. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.