

Harriet Alice Lindeman:

Good morning and welcome to morning prayers at Appleton Chapel. My name is Harriet Lindeman and I'm a master of divinity student at Harvard Divinity School and a seminarian here at Memorial Church. I will be offering some thoughts today, but first, please rise in body and in spirit for our responsive reading. Psalm 67, found in your black psalter.

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us.

Congregation:

That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving power among all nations.

Harriet Alice Lindeman:

Let the people's praise be oh God. Let all the people's praise thee.

Congregation:

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for thou dost judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth.

Harriet Alice Lindeman:

Let the people's praise be oh God, let all the people's praise Thee.

Congregation:

The Earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.

Harriet Alice Lindeman:

God has blessed us. Let all the ends of the earth fear Him. You may be seated.

Choir:

(Singing)

Harriet Alice Lindeman:

A poem from Toni Morrison, *Eve Remembering*. I tore from a limb fruit that had lost its green. My hands were warmed by the heat of an apple, fire, red and humming. I bit sweet power to the core. How can I say what it was like? The taste. The taste undid my eyes and led me far from the gardens planted for a child, to wildernesses deeper than any master's call. Now these cool hands guide what they once caressed, lips forget what they have kissed. My eyes now pool their light, better the summit to see. I would do it all over again. Be the harbor and set the sail, loose the breeze and harness the gale, cherish the harvest of what I have been. Better the summit to scale. Better the summit to be.

As I read these words from Eve as conjured by Toni Morrison. I feel something in me loosen and open. I've been learning to pay attention to this internal language as I move through a day. The choir's song just had a similar effect, right?

As Robin Wall Kimmerer writes in *Braiding Sweetgrass*. We are shaped by our creation stories no matter how distant they may be from our consciousness. Eve's story is somewhere with us here in the walls of this church, here in this school, here in this country, developed on the land of the people of Turtle Island with a different way of imagining creation. And so often Eve's story is told as one of banishment of a fall of shame. The kind of story that makes me tense up and turn inward rather than open myself to the world.

Shame is a shaky foundation on which to build because if it obscures our own goodness. It can be difficult to look at our flaws or mistakes without getting stuck in fear. For me growing up, this could be true for even the tiniest things. I remember for instance, running out of my second grade classroom in panic when I realized I had forgotten the school library book due that day, to be found sobbing on the ground outside by my teacher.

My shame in messing up obscured my ability to look at the actual situation at hand. And maybe I cannot blame Eve for all my childhood anxiety, and I've worked towards some perspective since then. But the visceral hold of this perfectionism and insecurity and shame still emerges in other ways in regards to real transgressions and the roots of shame become deep and tangled together so that we turn away from looking at harm caused collectively too.

As we know, Harvard released a report this spring about the institution's embeddedness in the violence of slavery inseparable from colonial genocide. We each have different relationships to this history. I, as the descendant of early European settlers can trace my family's connection to this story quite directly. How do we as individuals and as a community grapple with these painful truths with open hearts? How do we allow this to be a time of transformation?

Toni Morrison's Eve, speaking to us through the writer's own womanist consciousness doesn't get stuck in shame. The world she encounters outside the garden is full of sensation. And while she loses some forms of security, her hands become hands that guide and shape. She meets with boldness and clarity, storms and loss and change. We like to think about stories a lot in divinity school, and one thing I'm continually reminded is that while stories carry great power in shaping our realities, any one story can live and breathe and be reshaped in limitless ways.

Those of us who have inherited Eve as a part of our creation story or who find ourselves in a country shaped by those who have, cannot simply erase her. But let us, as we continue to live within and pass on sacred narratives and practices, look towards voices that create them anew. As Toni Morrison offers us with her, Eve. And grounding in our own imperfect goodness, may we open ourselves beyond shame to the grief of hard truths. May we see that the harmful history shaping a place like Harvard do not define us and yet do call each of us to find our place in the work towards repair. Please rise in body and spirit and join me in prayer.

Oh God of love, let us feel your presence in us and with us on this day. Bringing openness to the places we feel stuck, helping us move towards healing and finding our power and shaping the world anew. And now we 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 Alice Lindeman:

Let us sing the hymn in Christ, there is no east or west, number 341.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing)

Harriet Alice Lindeman:

Now may 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.