

Harriet Lindeman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Harriet Lindeman:

Welcome to morning prayers at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Reverend Rita Powell, Episcopal of Chapel here at Harvard. Welcome.

Please rise in body or in spirit for our responsive reading, Psalm 139, found in your black psalter.

Oh Lord, you have searched me and know me.

Congregation:

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

Harriet Lindeman:

You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

Congregation:

Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.

Harriet Lindeman:

You hem me in behind me and before, and lay your hand upon me.

Congregation:

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Harriet Lindeman:

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

Congregation:

If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

Harriet Lindeman:

If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

Congregation:

Even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Harriet Lindeman:

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me and the light around me become night."

Congregation:

Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Harriet Lindeman:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Rita Powell:

This morning, I'd like to talk about the divine feminine. This is something which the foundations of this place despise, the buildings, et cetera. So I speak about this to you here with some little trepidation. Never underestimate the power of the enemy. Ha-ha. May the great lady offer me what protection she can.

The words I would like to reflect on with you are from one of the texts found at the famous Nag Hammadi library. A cache of texts found in a cave in Egypt in 1945, who are believed to have been composed within the second to fourth centuries. The Dead Sea Scrolls, the Gospel of Thomas, and other so-called Gnostic writings were discovered. And among the treasure was the text I am going to read from called, Thunder Perfect Mind. It's genre may be that of aretology, a fun word I recently learned, which is a first person manifesto, in which the first person is a god. In this case, a god who is word and Lord, which sounds familiar to the Christian tradition. But the speaker in this text is not the regular male God we're used to, but something else. Should we say goddess? I'm not sure.

In seeking the divine feminine, we always have to reckon with the fact and ways that this Judeo-Christian tradition, of which I am ordained member and spokesperson, has suppressed this divinity for a long time now.

The tradition has had some notable women which has helped conceal this long suppression. I've come to believe, that the women we hear of in this tradition are firmly women in a male god story. What this means, is that to look for the big her, we have to be suspicious of the ways we think we can already find her, that we often turn out to still be within the male Gods story. Thus, goddess, a term whose addition of ess already sets in secondary relation to a primary male god, should not be immediately accepted without reserve. I digress.

Here, hear the voice of this thunder. She says, "Pay attention to me. I am she who is disgraced and she who is important. Pay attention to me, me to my impoverishment, and to my extravagance." Hey, I am trying to pay attention to someone who is disgraced, hated, despised, feared, and yet, who is essential to encounter, who is lavish and lush, extravagant with herself, she writes this. "I am the bride and I am the bridegroom, and it is my husband who gave birth to me. I am my father's mother, my husband's sister, and he is my child. I am the slave of him who served me. I am she the Lord. Wow. Father, Son and Spirit, eat your heart out.

I'm just kidding. I love the Trinity, I really do. But wow, this divine being, is that the right word, is involved in a much more complicated prism of interlocking relations, erotic, generative, powerful, humble. Pay attention to her extravagance. She is delightfully unbound by singularity of gender, or of being. What God could be all these things? All these things unto herself, and unto you, unto me.

She writes herself this perfect mind, this way next. "I am the silence never found, and the idea infinitely recalled. I am the voice with countless sounds, in the thousand guises of the word, I am the speaking of my name."

Into her swirl of divine relations themselves comes another kind of thunder, a silence, made of countless sounds. A silence never found, but sought and desired. An infinity of multiplicity. Uncountable ripples on a single moment of a wave seen from the shore. 26,000 species of lichen found in North America. Stars and galaxies, whose number makes us weep. This is the idea. The one whose name we do not know. A name unknown, and yet in countless sounds, the God unknown. The unknown God, and the silence never found, and the idea infinitely recalled. In the thousand guises of the word, I am the speaking of my name.

May we hold this day in heart, and mind, and blood, and bone, this sound, this unfound silence. An idea we were called to follow, a poverty of not knowing, an extravagance of perceiving. May we, to her, pay attention.

Harriet Lindeman:

Please rise, in body and spirit in prayer .Oh unknowable God, be with us on this morning. Help us to receive these words with open minds and hearts, reimagining our very sense of divinity that lives in, and through, and beyond us. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Harriet Lindeman:

And now let us pray 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 into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Harriet Lindeman:

Let us sing the hymn, We Sing for All the Unsung Saints, number 85.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing).

Harriet Lindeman:

And now, may the Lord bless you to keep you. The Lord make her face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up her countenance upon you and give you peace. Go in peace. Amen.

Congregation:

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Amen.