

Harriet Lindman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Harriet Lindman:

And welcome to morning prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning is Abby McElroy of Harvard College class of 2024. Welcome.

Also a note that next week we will have morning prayers on Monday and Tuesday, and then pause for the rest of the week for the holiday.

Please rise in body or in spirit for a responsive reading of Psalm 85, found in your black salter.

You have been gracious to your land, dear God. You have restored the good fortune of Jacob.

Congregation:

You have forgiven the iniquity of your people and blotted out their sins.

Harriet Lindman:

I will listen to what you are saying. For you are speaking peace to your faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to you.

Congregation:

Truly Your salvation is very near to those who hear you, that Your glory may dwell in our land.

Harriet Lindman:

Mercy and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Congregation:

Truth shall spring up from the earth and righteousness shall rain down from heaven.

Harriet Lindman:

You, oh God, will indeed grant prosperity and our land will yield its increase.

Congregation:

Righteousness shall go before You and peace shall [inaudible 00:06:21] Your feet.

Harriet Lindman:

He may be seated.

Choir:

(singing).

Abby McElroy:

A reading is from the gospel of Mary Oliver, beginning in her 2015 volume, *Felicity*.

"I have just said something ridiculous to you and in response, your glorious laughter. These are the days. The sun is swimming back to the east and the light on the water gleams as never, it seems, before."

"I can't remember every spring. I can't remember everything. So many years. Are the morning kisses the sweetest? Or the evenings? Or the in betweens? All I know is that thank you should appear somewhere."

So just in case I can't find the perfect place, thank you. Thank you."

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Abby McElroy:

Hanging around this church for the last year, I've heard a lot about the Good News. But today, I wanted to talk about another type of good news, queer joy. For me, one of these moments came weeks before the pandemic, when my first year roommate and I decided that what we were feeling was definitely love. I was ecstatic, filled with light I had never felt before. What good news.

When I called my mother to tell her, she revealed that she had been making bets with friends and family at dinner about when I would figure it out. What good news for her? A happy daughter, and the joy of being right.

Just weeks after that phone call, the world fell apart, and I returned home to Pennsylvania, unsure of when I would see my partner again. I turned to the books on my shelf, determined to finally read all of them. When I opened *The Color Purple*, more good news. I had no idea that in addition to being a book that centered Black resilience, it was also a book about queerness. In finding sophic love on the page, for the first time, I felt seen. I felt known. The love that was filling my heart and lungs. Here was a depiction of someone else feeling that, too.

I became hooked on the good news of queer love. During the pandemic, some people learned to bake. Others mapped their genealogies. I chased queer love stories. In each story, the sacred connection between two people, usually women, unfolded over countless pages and every single one felt like gift. And when I found these stories in religious and spiritual spaces, my heart flowed even more. The love of Ruth and Naomi, "Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God, my God."

One evening, lying in bed beside my partner, I felt my heart light up with good news. I had this sudden yet age-old realization that I, simply by nature of who I am and who I love, am connected to queer people through time and space. It was deeply joyful and deeply moving.

Of course, there have been moments when that good news has been obscured. Moments when, as the trans musician Spencer LaJoye sings, "Prayer has been used as a sword against me and my heart."

I have held my beloved friends as they have cried in the wake of religious homophobia and transphobia. I have cried in the face of religious homophobia and transphobia. I have felt unwelcome. I have felt unseen. I know that religious institutions so often kill queer people because these leaders and these institutions fail to see the good news of queer love and identity.

I know that this world has so much work to do before queer and trans people can approach religious, ethical, and spiritual life without fear of rejection. I too, so often, feel that fear. But I also have hope. I have hope in the quiet of the evening when someone shares the good news with me of their truest identity as they know it in that moment, of who they are, who they love, who they're allowing themselves to become. I have hope when I see queer and trans people praying together. Building libratory spaces. I have hope when straight cis religious people preach about queer celebration from the pulpit of Harvard Memorial Church.

I have hope, when on a warm September night, I read a bio of a poet I love. And for the first time, my eyes catch on the phrase her partner of 40 years, Molly, of course, more good news. That night before I go to sleep, I read and Mary Oliver's words to my partner. "So just in case I can't find the perfect place. Thank you, thank you."

I know that the love I feel in my heart and the love that so many queer people bring into the world is sacred. I know that it allows me to better understand the unending and infinite love the Divine wraps around each of us.

May we all be blessed with such good news. Will you pray with me? I draw my words from the blessing of Saint. Claire. "Holy one, help us to live and love without fear. To know that our Creator has made each of us Holy, has always protected us, and loves us as a mother. As we go in peace to follow the good road and the good news, may God's blessing be with us always. Amen."

Congregation:

Amen.

Harriet Lindman:

Please rise as we pray as Jesus taught us"

"Our Father who art in heaven. Hallowed be they name. They 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 the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Let us sing the hymn, "Mother and God, You Gave Me Birth," number 254.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing).

Harriet Lindman:

And now, may the Lord bless you and 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 and love and divine joy. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.