

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning is Nicole Newell of the University Choir. Please rise as you're able and join me in our responsive reading, found on page 71 of your black Psalter.

I cry with my voice to the Lord, with my voice I make supplication to the Lord.

Congregation:

I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him.

Elizabeth Propst:

When my spirit is faint, thou knowest the way. In the path where I walk, they have hidden a trap for me.

Congregation:

I looked to my right and watch, but there is none who takes notice of me. No refuge remains to me, no man cares for me.

Elizabeth Propst:

I cry to thee O Lord. I say, "Thou art my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."

Congregation:

Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low. Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me.

Elizabeth Propst:

Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to thy name.

Congregation:

The righteous will surround me, for thou will deal bountifully with me.

Choir:

(singing)

Nicole Newell:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Nicole Newell:

A reading from A Day in the Life of Oscar the Grouch. "At seven o'clock in the morning, I eat breakfast. Today I'm having orange rinds, rotten eggs, burned bacon, and stale breadcrumbs. What a great meal."

This book, A Day in the Life of Oscar the Grouch, became beloved to me a few years before I came to Divinity School, while I was living in a large community in Washington DC. L'Arche is a community of people with and without disabilities who share life together. L'Arche was my home for two years, and I felt that sense of home from the moment I met Andrew Comisso. On the day I met Andrew, he invited me to read Oscar the Grouch with him. It would be the first of countless times. At any party or gathering, Andrew was the host, introducing folks to each other. He knew how to welcome, and always sought out the newest person in the room to make friends with them. He used sign language and walked with assistance. So when I hung out with Andrew, we were quite literally walking with one another hand in hand. He loved ice cream and singing, and he loved to read Sesame Street books with old friends and new.

Over the course of the two years that I knew Andrew, I read Oscar the Grouch at home, at the breakfast table, at the hospital, at our favorite neighborhood coffee shop. Andrew would turn the pages as I read aloud, sometimes too quickly for me to even finish reading the page. As soon as I finished, he'd pass the book to someone else to read it aloud to. Sometimes this person was a family member, or a L'Arche person. But sometimes, it was the person sitting next to Andrew on the bus, or the staff at a cafe. One friend at a time, Andrew led everyone he knew in a communal reading practice. Many of us at L'Arche memorized Oscar's grumpy lines by default from hearing them so often, and we recited them to Andrew, because we knew they would make him laugh. After all, the book is about how Oscar is happiest when everyone else is grouchy. He loves burned bacon and mud trucks, and he keeps a pet worm, and he gets annoyed at people who say hello to him.

But maybe the thing about Oscar the Grouch that is most important is that, in his monologue complaining about his day, he reached into our grumpy souls and he made us laugh. He brought out the silly voices in the most stoic of us. He reminded us to keep it all in perspective, to enjoy being just who we are.

I have come to think of a day in the life of Oscar the Grouch as a kind of contemplative text; because in that community, it was shared and repetitive. We read it aloud, we read it often, and we read it together. It became a part of how we talked about our neighborhood and our moods. How we reminded each other to lighten up when we were a little bit grouchy.

When Andrew died in 2021, I continued to find great comfort and closeness with Andrew in his favorite texts, Oscar the Grouch was at my bedside table accompanying me in my tears. This text, among others, became my prayer when I didn't know how to pray. It was the thread that held me to Andrew, and thinned the boundaries of earth and heaven, so I could feel him laughing beside me again, holding my hand, tugging on my heart.

This text, and perhaps it is for Andrew's friends, a sacred text, held not only me in that time, but everyone who knew Andrew. A Sesame Street tune was the first song to ring out at Andrew's funeral in the old Catholic church he had attended for many years. His beloved texts had become sacred to us all, because we loved him and he loved us.

And while Andrew loved the story of Oscar the Grouch too, perhaps all along, he read that book with us over and over again, not just because he loved it, but also because the lines were words that we, his

friends, needed to hear over and over again, so we could have them with us when we needed them most.

Will you pray with me? Our God this morning, we give thanks for those things that bring us together, for meals, for laughter, for stories, for friends and for strangers, for grief, and for love. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

Will you please rise, in body or spirit, for the Lord's prayer.

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.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please join in singing our concluding hymn, number 91 in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

Elizabeth Propst:

Christ has no hands in this world but your hands, and no voice in this world but your voice. Let our hands and our voices do the work of justice and of love, on this day and on all days. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.