

Harriet Lindman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

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Harriet Lindman:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Kent Montgomery French, senior pastor of the United Parish in Brookline and former seminarian here. Welcome. Please rise in body or in spirit for a responsive greeting of Psalm 42 found in your black Appleton psalter. As the heart longs for flowing streams so longs my soul for thee oh God.

Congregation:

My soul thirsts for God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?

Harriet Lindman:

My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

Congregation:

These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng.

Harriet Lindman:

And led them in possession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.

Congregation:

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?

Harriet Lindman:

Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him. My help and my God.

Congregation:

Deep calls to deep at the thunder of the cataracts: All thy waves and billows have gone over me.

Harriet Lindman:

As with the deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

Congregation:

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall again praise Him, my help and my God.

Choir:

(Singing)

Kent Montgomery French:

It's a pleasure and privilege to speak with you this morning and not just sing loudly from the pews. In this place, that has been my spiritual home for nearly 35 years. Jesus said to His disciples, as we read in the 10th chapter of the Gospel of John, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Recently, I've been in conversations with colleagues and with parishioners and a local synagogue about the meaning of home. What does it mean to you? A place of safety and security. A place with a warm bed and clean conditions for eating, sleeping, and bathing, much like where I imagine all of us woke up this morning. A place where we can be truly ourselves, where we can rest, laugh, and play. A place of emotional security. I imagine this is something that is on the mind of the undergraduates in our midst and out at the rally as they await their housing assignments for next year.

What kind of living situation is most going to help them thrive? In Brookline, we've been having these conversations because we've become aware of a significant number of our neighbors who live in less than adequate conditions in the sum of 1000 public housing units in our town. Right under our noses in Brookline. A place where people often move to have their kids in the schools where the median price for a home is between one and 1.5 million, where the average monthly rent is above 3000, and I watch as market rates push the young families in my congregation further and further away from us.

One of the promises of the American experience as enshrined in our founding documents is this idea that the Creator has endowed us with inalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. One of the central tenets of our idealized national ethos in what sociologists have called American civil religion.

And for me, it lines up with the Christian claim that Jesus came, that we may have life more abundantly. Certainly, MLK and the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement brilliantly held our feet to the fire about these ideals mixing up both our political and faith commitments, stoking our moral imaginations and calling us to do better. So what specifically are the inalienable rights that allow us to experience life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to be able to access these ideals? Certainly, because of efforts in the 19th century, we've come to believe that access to education is an inalienable right. FDR and the New Deal helped us move forward to think that some sort of social security in old age is an alienable right, however imperfectly we've established and continue to debate it. And even though national healthcare has been in the political conversation since 1912 with people like Teddy Roosevelt and Harry Truman advocating for it, we still struggle to come to a national consensus that this is in fact an inalienable right.

Sometimes it's helpful to have an outside perspective. Last year I had a conversation with a Danish acquaintance while I was traveling on sabbatical about our national healthcare woes compared to his country. When I told him that after a relatively mild face plant for my bicycle, I received a \$41,000 emergency bill, something for which the hospital and health insurance company bartered that I should pay at least \$1800. He shook his head and stunned belief and said, "This is really evil."

Yes, my friend, it is evil, especially when you consider that I sit rather socioeconomically comfortable and have what's considered pretty good health insurance. It's also been helpful this year to have a Romanian seminarian who has been appalled to see how we treat the economically poorest members of our society as our congregation discovers the neighbors around us. Because another area where we have failed to agree or even make progress on an alienable right is access to good housing.

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights first recognized safe, stable, affordable housing as an inalienable right, which has been reaffirmed by many international treaties resolutions and declarations. And yet here in the capitalist republic of the United States of America, it is still considered a commodity to attain. And here in the commonwealth of Massachusetts where we see rising housing prices pushing people out of the cities, even out of our state, we have some 81,000 affordable housing units, a mix of federal and state. It's about 2700 right here in Cambridge. Most of these units were built in the 1960s or earlier and have not had any major improvements since. Some are close to being condemned and estimated \$10 to \$12 billion worth of investment needs to be made. If you go for a visit, you'll discover our fellow citizens, our neighbors living units with crumbling staircases, flaking asbestos, incessant vermin investigation, failing appliances, inoperative and leaking windows, miserable energy performance, and antiquated plumbing.

One of my parishioners living in such a unit in Coolidge Corner, Brookline has been out of her apartment since New Year's Eve because of a burst water pipe that ruined a huge chunk of her building. But public housing tenants have had very little voice on Beacon Hill, unlike real estate developers. And Mayor Wu and Governor Healy have made clear their commitments to better access to housing. However, in the governor's recent \$55.5 billion state budget, they made no increases in public housing. I'm grateful to be a part of an organization called the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, GBIO, which is a coalition of about 60 houses of faith, including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and a service workers Union. GBIO was a leader in the healthcare reform of the early 2000s that eventually became a template for the Affordable Care Act or Obamacare.

It's part of a national network of local community organizing coalitions that believes that one-on-one real relationships are the core of moving things forward. Building real relationships with power brokers like the governor, speaker of the house, senate president, real estate developers, healthcare insurance CEOs, and public housing advocates. And next Thursday we'll be gathering... A week from this morning, we'll be gathering on the State House steps at 10:00 AM to begin our campaign to ask the legislature for an \$8.5 billion investment in affordable housing. Just as the letter of James says that faith without works is dead. I've learned that social justice work without real political strategy is impotent. So I invite you to keep this justice and advocacy work in your prayers. Keep your eyes and ears open because it'll be in the papers. Join us if you can, so that all of us might live into Jesus' commandment. A reminder that we are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves. Let us pray.

Thank you, universal God, our true home. For the gift of home on this earth, for the comfort, love, grounding, and assurance it brings. Work with us, guide us, and inspire us, move hearts and minds and powerful hands that we will make this a living reality as we seek to love our neighbors as ourselves. And as Jesus taught us, we are now bold to pray together. Our creator 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. Thy is the kingdom, power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Harriet Lindman:

Although it is not what's written in your order of service, please rise and join in singing the hymn, Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life, number 340.

Congregation/choir:

(Singing)

Harriet Lindman:

And 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.