

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to Morning Prayers, here in the Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning is the Reverend Cody Sanders. Please rise, as you're able, and join in our responsive Psalm 104. "Bless the Lord, oh my soul. Oh Lord, my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty."

Congregation:

"Wrapped in light as with a garment; you stretched out the heavens like a tent."

Elizabeth Propst:

"You set the beams of your chambers on the waters. You make the clouds your chariot. You ride on the wings of the wind."

Congregation:

"You make the winds your messengers, fire and flame are your messengers."

Elizabeth Propst:

"You set the earth on its foundations so that it shall never be shaken."

Congregation:

"You cover the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains."

Elizabeth Propst:

"At your rebuke, they flee. At the sound of your thunder, they take to flight."

Congregation:

"They rose up to the mountains, run down into the valleys, to the place that you appoint them."

Elizabeth Propst:

"May the glory of the Lord endure forever. May the Lord rejoice in his works."

Congregation:

"He looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke."

Choir:

(singing)

Cody J. Sanders:

Reading from 1st Corinthians 13. "If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels, but do not have love, I'm a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end. As for tongues, they will cease. As for knowledge, it will come to an end."

Universities have often drawn upon biblical images and phrases to craft their Latin mottos. For example, before the 1643 motto, Veritas, was retrieved from the archives in 1836, the Harvard Corporation of 1650 chose In Christi Gloriam, For the Glory of Christ, as the school's motto. My alma mater's motto is Pro Deo et Humanitate, For God and Humanity. Luther Seminaries, where I would soon join the faculty, is Christus Lux Mundi, Christ, the Light of the World, right out of the Gospel of John.

I recently discovered that Baylor's motto is Pro Ecclesia, Pro Texana, For Church, For Texas. That's half biblical at least. But someday, I'd like to walk through the stately stone gates of some college and look up to see inscribed on their ornate seal the words Knowledge Veniet ad Finem, Knowledge Will Come to an End. I doubt it'll catch on anywhere, but it would be Veritas. And actually, what Paul was saying here is much more radical than that because he also says prophecies will come to an end. In other words, there is a limit even to inspired religious knowledge.

Even if your acts of charity empty your bank accounts and deprive you of your very own body, even if you come to understand all mysteries and all knowledge, even if you have faith to move mountains, you will arrive at their limits every single time. Nothing brings us to the limits of our knowledge, our ability to do good, even our many and varied ways of faith than the limit experience of standing in face of death.

One of the most sacred tasks I've undertaken in my role as President of the Harvard Chaplains is being present in times of extreme crisis. And in an academic community of over 35,000 students, it's statistically reasonable to imagine that deaths will occur from time to time, some by accident and injury, others at the end of long illnesses, some by suicide. Yet, despite statistics, when it happens, it is always a shock to the ones who love that student; their friends, their colleagues, their professors, their house staff. And our ability to make good sense of it, our ability to say anything profound that will turn things around, our capacity to acquire knowledge that will make any difference at all in the situation, all comes to an end.

Recently, I had a conversation with an elder minister friend of mine whom I've admired for many years. He told me about a conversation he had with a minister friend of his, someone else I've admired for many years, who died several years ago. In their last conversation, the dying minister said to his friend, "You've conducted hundreds of funerals. Tell me what you say." And the other minister said to his dying friend, "In all of those funerals, I think I've only ever said one thing, but I've said it in a lot of different ways, 'Love never ends.'" His friend replied, "I hope so."

As I've stood with communities of students and faculty and staff in times of deep grief all around this campus, I've been witness to the limits of knowledge and words and theological frameworks when standing in the face of death, and in the presence of the absence of someone who should be with us and no longer is. And when I've stood on that sacred ground, I've witnessed the same thing happen again and again at our limits, through tears, in our shock and sadness, voices call forth from the crowd. Unsteady at first, soft and shaken, but soon, more firm and confident. Basically, all saying one thing, but in a lot of different ways, "Love never ends."

Love perpetually summons the departed loved ones back into the community of the living. It is love that wraps them in comfort and warmth when our arms no longer can do so. Love knits a community back together again when we've started to come apart at our limits. I doubt I'll ever see a seal inscribed with Knowledge Veniet ad Finem on the front of university gates, but I think that what could be more important is what a school puts on the backside of its gates, the side you see when you're leaving.

So that all who depart the campus, whether they leave with a degree they meant to earn or not, some believing they understand all mysteries and all knowledge, others knowing for the first time that they know almost nothing at all, some graduating with a class that is missing a beloved number, on their way

out, everyone could look up and see another seal, less ornate and grandiose, not even in Latin, that would say, Love never ends. Would you join your hearts in prayer?

Holy One, who sees us at our limits, even at the limits of our very lives, You have been called upon by many names, and we are gathered here in this place to call You by the name synonymous with Your being, love. Love that is within us, love that surrounds us, love that moves through us and draws us together. We revel in the goodness of knowing that when we know love, we also know You. Now, may all of our faith and all of our hope flow forth from this promise that love never ends. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please rise and embody your spirit for the Lord's Prayer.

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, for ever and ever. Amen.

Please join in our closing hymn, "Sing, my soul, His wondrous love," Number 225.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

Elizabeth Propst:

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

Congregation:

Amen.