

Harriet Lindman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Harriet Lindman:

And welcome to Morning Prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Shir Lovett-Graff, Masters of Theological Studies candidate at Harvard Divinity School. Welcome.

Please rise in body and spirit for a responsive reading of Psalm 114, found in your black psalter.

When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,

Congregation:

Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel his dominion.

Harriet Lindman:

The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back.

Congregation:

The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs.

Harriet Lindman:

Why is it, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back?

Congregation:

O mountains, that you skip like rams? O hills, like lambs?

Harriet Lindman:

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob,

Congregation:

Who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water.

Choir:

(singing)

Shir Lovett-Graff:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Shir Lovett-Graff:

Poet Adrienne Rich writes, "But nothing less than the most radical imagination will carry us beyond this place, beyond the mere struggle for survival, to that lucid recognition of our possibilities which will keep us impatient, and unresigned to mere survival."

I spent this summer living in Jerusalem in dire need of radical imagination. The political and moral crises surrounding me served in parallel to my internal crises around my gender and queer journey.

For years, I found myself called toward a rabbinical path, and dreamed of building Jewish communities grounded in values of justice, compassion, and liberation for all. But faced with the on the ground reality of state violence, settler colonialism, fermented trauma and religious nationalism, I found myself asking, how could God have allowed this to happen? What was I being called to do in response?

This crisis of faith matched a growing discontent with my gender expression, and being perceived as a cis woman by partners, family, and the world around me, I reach a breaking point. Walking around the old city of Jerusalem, surrounded by gendered expressions of religious devotion and religious expressions of gender, I realized I would need to medically and socially transition to live as my true self.

One early morning, I walked to the Western Wall, the holiest sight for the Jewish people, and stood for a while on the women's side. Surrounded by women and girls lost in prayer, their heads pressed against the ancient stone, I found myself starting to cry. I realized, this would likely be the last time I could ever stand on the women's side of the Western Wall, and be true to myself before God. Surrounded by a political reality that was undoubtedly corrupting the many spiritual hearts of this holy land. I was in a profound wilderness, a spiritual crisis, and a deep depression. In other words, I had what Rabbi Benay Lappe calls, a crash. A crash is the pivotal moment when you realize your life is not going to turn out the way you planned.

I wish I could say I had a moment of revelation looking over Jerusalem, basked in the golden morning light, and feeling a clear call towards my future. But like most journeys through the wilderness, this call lay muffled and distant. Instead, what emerged over time, with the support of friends and family, therapy and self-reflection, was that I needed to invest in radical imagination.

As a child, I spent hours entertain myself with stories about worlds that did not exist. My daily life was grounded in play, creation, and dreaming beyond the norms of reality. When we realize our lives will not turn out the way we planned, we are called to reach back toward our child selves, and reaccess the imagination that flowed freely within us in our youth. Like children, we need to see the world as a space of endless possibility. But as adults, we're not often given permission to engage and play with radical imagination. So what do we need in order to imagine?

First, we need community. We need people to trust and explore ideas with. We need people who are like us, and who can serve as models for who we become.

Second, we need time and space. We need time to rest, and we need Sabbath. We need art we don't have to be good at, and respite from productivity culture.

And finally, we need grief. We need spaces to hold the names we no longer carry. We need rituals to honor the dreams of our parents, that we will not be living out. As queer and trans people, political radicals, abolitionists and anti-Zionists, imagination is our calling. As people who exist in the hyphen, the slash, the parenthetical, and the in-between, imagination is, and has always been, our home.

May we be blessed by our ancestors who dreamed to dare before us. May we be blessed by our descendants whose dreams we seed. May we dream in vivid color, and expand ourselves to imagine radical worlds and new ways of being. Amen.

Harriet Lindman:

Please rise in body and spirit. And now, we pray as Jesus taught saying...

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 Lindman:

Please join in singing the hymn, Awake, Awake, to Love and Work, number 46.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

Harriet Lindman:

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. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.