

Courtney Godwin:

Good morning.

Congregation:

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Courtney Godwin:

Welcome to Morning Prayers in Appleton Chapel. This week we will be honoring Climate Week at Morning Prayers with a special focus on several of our pilgrims from the Iceland pilgrimage a few weeks ago. Our first speaker this week is Zoe Nagasawa, a sophomore at the college. Will you please rise, as you are able, for our responsive Psalm, number 130?

"Out of the depths have I called to you, oh God. Hear my voice. Let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication."

Congregation:

"If you were to note what is done amiss. Oh God, who could stand?"

Courtney Godwin:

"For there is forgiveness with you therefore, you shall be feared."

Congregation:

"I wait for you, oh God. My soul waits for you. In your word is my hope."

Courtney Godwin:

"My soul waits for you more than the centuries for the morning, more than the centuries for the morning."

Congregation:

"Oh, Israel wait for our God, for with God there's mercy."

Courtney Godwin:

"With God there's plenteous redemption. God shall redeem Israel from all their sins." You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing).

Zoe Nagasawa:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Zoe Nagasawa:

I'll be reading from Psalm 46 today.

"God is our refuge and strength and ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging."

The first full day that we were in Iceland, Reverend Pots asked us to reflect on what apocalypse means to us, we are after all living in the midst of one. As Psalm 46 says, "The earth is giving way, the seas are surging, mountains are falling, temperatures are rising." All of this is apocalyptic. It signals the death of coral reefs around the world, the melting of glaciers, the rapid sinking of islands, the suffocation of my poor, under-resourced predominantly black and brown neighborhood, the starvation of people like my own all around the globe. It signals something like the end of days. Apocalypse for me means the death of beauty because when beauty dies, joy dies with it. And when joy dies, what hope is there for life?

We witnessed a mini apocalypse in Iceland. We walked on a melting glacier, a chunk of living ice that has existed for thousands of years and has been melting away at increasingly rapid rates for the last 30. We walked on Isle ash from a volcanic eruption that happened in 1918, and we watched as it blew away into the wind forever scattered. A piece of history that we would never see again. And we posed and took pictures on top of it, pictures that are frivolous and silly. Pictures like the hundreds of tourists that visit the glacier every day and promptly forget about it. Pictures that all eventually post on Instagram because they're cute. But this is the death of beauty. This was the death of beautiful moving, moaning, musical ice. It was the death of history. It was the death of our ability to resonate with the creation that should shake us to our bones and make us sing like the ice sings. And I was furious about it. I was livid. How could we witness so much devastation and still have so much fun? How could we be there to reflect on this apocalypse but engage in so little lament? It felt like exploitation being on that ice. It felt like being complicit in a murder. It felt like grief.

But that night after dinner, the Northern Lights danced, and I went outside and I sat in the grass with a lump of my anger clutched close to my heart. I watched them and I prayed and I was reminded that the Christian God is a God of beauty. Because even in the midst of the melting, that glacier was still beautiful. And in the dark of the night, in the darkness of my confusion and my anger, the Northern Lights were beautiful. In the middle of chaos and the crush of schoolwork, the conversations I had with my fellow pilgrims, the connections and bonds that we built were beautiful. And that is how God works.

My God is a God of creation, of light in the middle of darkness, of flowering beauty where before there was nothing. Even as beauty dies, even in the midst of apocalypse, God is creating new life. He's allowing new beauty to flourish. He is showing me Northern Lights dancing in a dark sky. And where there is beauty there is joy. And where there is joy, there is hope. And with hope comes peace. And with hope also comes responsibility. Because when we are hopeful, we cannot absolve ourselves of the responsibility to make our hopes come true.

God is our refuge and our strength, our ever-present help in times of need. And with his strength, with his love, with his hope, we can take firm and rooted action.

I don't think our pilgrimage brought us any closer to tangibly addressing climate change, but I think my heart posture towards climate action shifted. I will never not carry some anger, grief, and fear with me, but I am studying environmental engineering and environmental policy and I'm going to pursue a career in environmental activism. And if I try to use my anger to fuel my work, I'm going to burn out real fast. Love, hope, community, they are much more sustainable sources of energy. And in the midst of this apocalypse, in the midst of this climate crisis, they are the beautiful things God has given us to fight for and fight with. And fight we must. And fight I will.

The earth is giving way. Glaciers are melting. History is being lost. People around the world are suffering. My people are suffocating. We are faced with so much loss. And faced with this loss, I can choose anger or I can choose joy. I can choose despair or I can choose hope. I can choose to act in fear or I can choose to act in faith. In the end, there is no choice at all. Let us pray.

Lord God, thank you for meeting us where we are. Thank you that you are a God that allows us to surrender, laying our finitude down in front of your eternity and that your perfect love drives out all fear and leaves us only with faith. Lord, you are creator and shaper, shepherd and gardener, and you made this earth your garden. You created abundance beyond anything we could ever deplete and love beyond anything we could ever corrupt. You are a God who loves the orphan and the widow, a God who moves in the darkest of nights, a God who brings beauty out of chaos and constantly renews it. You are a God who grieves and laments with us, whose heart contains more sorrow for the oppressed and the marginalized than we could ever imagine and more wrath at injustice and inequity than we could ever fathom. You are a God who loves us. And Lord, I pray that you fill us with that love, that we would be overflowing with your peace and your purpose and your hope. And that with that hope, we find our calling to both rest and to work, that we might strive to tend this garden with you, that we might protect your creation and your people. In your holy name I pray. Amen.

Please rise, in body or spirit for the Lord's prayer.

Our Father who art in heaven-

Congregation:

... 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.

Zoe Nagasawa:

Please join in singing our congregational hymn, number four, For the Beauty of the Earth.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing).

Courtney Godwin:

God you are always with us. In the midst of the chaos, in the midst of the death of beauty and joy, you are always creating more beauty and more joy. Help us to recognize those in our life. Help us to continue to create your joy, especially through our relationships with one another, and help us to feel the responsibility that comes with beauty, with joy, with hope, and with peace. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.