

Courtney Godwin:

Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning. Good morning.

Courtney Godwin:

Our sound system is not on today. Hopefully I'm loud enough. If not, and you want to move forward, come on. Great. Welcome to Morning Prayers in Appleton Chapel. This morning our speaker is Simeon Sayer. He is a senior in Adams House and is beginning our senior talks for this year. Welcome.

Please rise in body or spirit for our responsive psalm, number 81 in your black salter. Sing aloud unto God our strength. Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.

Audience:

Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psalter.

Courtney Godwin:

Blow up the trumpet in the new moon in the time appointed on our solemn feast day.

Audience:

For this was a statute for Israel and a law of the God of Jacob.

Courtney Godwin:

Thou calledst in trouble and I delivered thee. I answered thee in the secret place of thunder. I proved thee at the waters of Meribah.

Audience:

Hear, oh my people, and I will testify unto thee. Oh Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me.

Courtney Godwin:

There shall no strange god be in thee. Neither shalt thou worship any strange god.

Audience:

I am the lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

Courtney Godwin:

You may be seated.

Choir:

(singing)

Simeon Sayer:

Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning.

Simeon Sayer:

I'd like to begin by reading from the first chapter of the Book of Mark, beginning at the 32nd verse. "That evening at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who are with him search for him, and they found him and said to him, 'Everyone is looking for you.' And he said to them, 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I might preach there also, for that is why I came out.' And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons." Praise be to God.

It is my distinct pleasure to be speaking to you this morning as the representative of Adams House Center for graduating class of 2023. I want to invite you to think in reflection for a moment on your journey here this morning, not your spiritual journey, but your physical one.

I want to invite you in particular to reflect on what information you have taken in already today. Perhaps you woke to an alarm on your phone and took the opportunity to check a text or your Instagram. If you drove here this morning, did you listen to the news on the radio or perhaps a podcast?

I want you next to make a prediction about how much more information you'll consume for the rest of today. A study published in the Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health finds that the average American in their early twenties or a typical Harvard undergrad will average four hours on their phone today alone. Laptops, headphones, smart watches giving us the texts, emails, and headlines we desire. We live in a hyper-connected information saturated world.

Let me ask this in a different way. When was the last time you were actually bored? Not the kind of half board where you end up on YouTube for three hours while your brain switches into a vegetative, semi pleasurable numbness, but actually fundamentally bored. It was probably the last time your phone died and you were estranged from your charger.

Now, consider that biologically, that is our default state. It is from this state that our brain is best suited to come up with new ideas, plan for the future, and access memories. Think about those times where you've been lying awake at night and remember something you were supposed to do earlier in the day and consider why you didn't think of it earlier. Were you really that busy throughout the day or were you just numb with mild, easily digestible information and entertainment that'll have no bearing on the rest of your life?

I guarantee you watched at least one video yesterday, whether on YouTube or on Instagram or on TikTok or even just the news. Can you remember what it was? What about the day before that? What exactly do all these hours of digital consumption result in?

Now, I am a computer scientist. Technology and its capabilities are why I was admitted here as a student. It's what I hope to build my career around and is what I'm passionate about. I am not speaking this morning to try and talk you all back into the dark ages.

I am also a Christian. I believe that God's design and creation is both perfect and beautiful and that each of us are made in his image. But the reality is that the world we live in and our daily routine within it is very different to the one we read about in the Bible.

Our bodies were not built to sit in a chair for 12 hours a day. When we read in Proverbs about the dangers of spreading gossip, I am not sure its author had a passive-aggressive Facebook post in mind. These sorts of modern differences make applying any part of the Bible or any other religious text more difficult, but we can always learn from the broader messages and themes. Indeed, Jesus helped us to do that by teaching using stories and parables that transcend all times and cultures.

In the reading I selected, we heard of Jesus working in and around Galilee, expelling demons and healing the sick. Mark writes that the whole city was gathered at his door. Jesus was dealing with crowds and serving each person with ultimate love and humility. If you ask me, that sounds exhausting, but instead of sleeping in the next morning as I would've been tempted to do, Jesus rises and goes to a desolate place to pray.

Throughout scripture there are many examples of Jesus doing this, often after he has performed miracles. After feeding the 5,000, Jesus goes into the mountains by himself to pray. When Jesus cures a man of leprosy in Luke chapter five, he similarly retreats. Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus spends time walking alone or in the wilderness dwelling with the Father. On the night he is betrayed, Jesus brings the disciples to a garden where he goes by himself to pray.

How much time do we actually spend alone with our thoughts, and if we have them, our prayers? Not the kind of reflection where we are listening to music, walking, checking our Twitter feed, but total honest reflection. I know I struggle with this.

Recently I've been making the most of the warm weather or albeit not today and have tried to just sit on a bench and enjoy the sun. I normally get about five minutes before I feel the need to check my phone or my watch. Even if I am listening to music, I'm browsing my playlist and the second song to see what is coming up next. That isn't how Jesus spent time alone and perhaps he was onto something.

I asked this morning for you to reflect on the fact that how we spend our days is how we spend our lives and if you so wish to join me in this prayer. Lord God, you are infinitely wise. You sent your holy spirits to dwell among us so that we may commune with you wherever and however we are able to, Lord. Let us use this precious gift and meet with you in quiet personal reflection with you.

God, you know it is difficult to find quiet in a noisier and noisier world. Help us follow Jesus' example by seeking you, even when the crowds are at the door. Let us acknowledge Lord, that you are only able to use us as much as we allow ourselves to be used by you, and that if we seek to hear you, Lord, we should first stop and listen.

Give us focus and composure to navigate this busy world and bless us today to be a source of peace and love to those who share it with. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Audience:

Amen.

Simeon Sayer:

Now lead us in 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, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Audience:

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, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

Please rise in body or spirit for our closing hymn, number 315, Lead Us, O Father, in the Paths of Peace.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

Courtney Godwin:

As we go out into this day, let us remember that how we spend our days is how we spend our lives. So let us spend them both our days and our lives in the way that Jesus did, following his path and following your light. Oh, God. Amen.

Audience:

Amen.