

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning is Jack Markert, Harvard College Class of 2023, continuing with our next couple weeks of Senior Talks. Please rise as you're able, embody your spirit for our responsive Psalm, number 90, in your black Appleton psalter, you got it.

"Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to another."

Congregation:

"Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and the earth were born, from age to age you are God."

Elizabeth Propst:

"You turn us back to the dust and say, "Go back, O child of Earth.""

Congregation:

"For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night."

Elizabeth Propst:

"You sweep us away like a dream; we fade away suddenly like the grass."

Congregation:

"In the morning it is green and flourishes; in the evening it is dried up and withered."

Elizabeth Propst:

"When you are angry, all our days are gone; we bring our years to an end like a sigh."

Congregation:

"The span of our life is 70 years, perhaps in strength even 80; yet the sum of them is but labor and sorrow, for they pass away quickly and we are gone."

Elizabeth Propst:

"Who regards the power of your wrath? Who rightly fears your indignation?"

Congregation:

"So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom."

Choir:

(Singing).

Jack Markert:

Hi everyone.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Jack Markert:

My name is Jack Markert, and I'm a senior in Leverett House. Thank you all for giving me the opportunity to speak with you all today. First off, I'd like to start off with a reading from the Baha'i writings, about the importance of universal education. "The perpetuation of ignorance is a most grievous form of oppression. It reinforces the many walls of prejudice that stand as barriers to the realization of the oneness of humankind... Access to knowledge is the right of every human being, and participation in its generation, application, and diffusion a responsibility that all must shoulder in the great enterprise of building a prosperous world civilization, each individual according to his or her talents and abilities. Justice demands universal participation."

During college, I've worked extensively in the Harvard Interfaith Forum, an organization that seeks to promote religious unity by creating an environment for mutual understanding and dialogue among all backgrounds, to prevent harm from religious ignorance. We've had a variety of discussions in Interfaith, including topics surrounding prayer, religious literacy, and deepening knowledge about the significance of the world's religious holy days. Having organizations like Interfaith helps students learn about their classmates who come from diverse religious, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, and use these experiences to promote an appreciation for diversity.

My motivation for the pursuit of religious harmony comes from my background. I come from a family of Iranian refugees, persecuted for being Baha'ist, a religious minority founded by Baha'u'llah in Persia, during mid-1800s. Since the inception of the Baha'i faith, its members have been heavily persecuted, especially in Iran, for their beliefs. After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, that persecution has intensified, with laws denying Baha'is access to education, jailing them for teaching their children, and even sentencing them to death for refusing to renounce their faith. My grandfather's extended family endured great sacrifices when they left Iran, fleeing on foot across the country, with nothing but a few valuables sewn into the hems of their clothing, eventually seeking refuge in Pakistan, and later joining our family members already in the US. If I had been born in Iran, I too would've been persecuted from my religious beliefs, and would've been denied a basic education during my childhood. The fact that I'm preparing to graduate from Harvard next month is a testament to the ideals of this country, that acknowledges the rights of all citizens to education.

As I reflect on my college experience, I'm struck by the power that access to education has as a way to create understanding, reduce prejudices, celebrate authentic connection, and build the foundation for prosperous world civilization; that has the potential to elevate each human being to their fullest potential. Again, quoting Baha'u'llah, "Each of us a gem of inestimable value." As we prepare for graduation, I entreat my fellow students to utilize the education that each of us has been so blessed to receive, to overcome our individual prejudices, to contribute to the betterment of our world's civilization, and to serve humanity. Thank you.

And now I'd like to, on that note, recite a prayer from the Baha'i writings, for unity. "Oh my God! Oh my God! Unite the hearts of thy servants and reveal to them thy great purpose. May they follow thy

commandments and abide in thy law. Help them, O God, in their endeavor, and grant them strength to serve thee. O God! Leave them not to themselves, but guide their steps by the light of Thy knowledge, and cheer their hearts by thy love. Verily, thou art their helper and their Lord." Thank you.

Elizabeth Propst:

And 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. 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."

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. 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."

Elizabeth Propst:

And please join in our closing hymn, Christ Is Made The Sure Foundation, number 262.

Congregation:

(Singing).

Elizabeth Propst:

God 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.