

Harriet Lindman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Harriet Lindman:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Michael Chen, senior speaker of Mather House. Welcome. Please rise in body or in spirit for responsive reading of psalm 130, found in your black Psalter. 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, O God, who could stand?.

Harriet Lindman:

For there is forgiveness with you. Therefore, you shall be feared.

Congregation:

I wait for you, O God: my soul waits for you; in your word is my hope. My soul waits for you. Your word is my hope.

Harriet Lindman:

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

Congregation:

O Israel, wait upon God for with Gog, there is mercy.

Harriet Lindman:

With God, there is redemption. God shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

Choir:

(Singing).

Michael Chen:

The inspired text this morning, an excerpt from Matthew 6:25-34 titled, Do Not Be Anxious. Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body. What you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? If God so close the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, oh, you of little faith? Therefore, do not be anxious saying, "What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear?" But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Thank you so much to the Memorial Church staff and to my Mather family for having me here today, and a big shout-out to the U choir and my roommate Chris.

In many ways this writing process has felt like writing my final term paper for Harvard, and you all, the audience, are the grading professor. So, please, I beg you, go easy on me and don't forget the great inflation that we're so famous for. I spent a lot of time thinking about what I want to say to you all today. Should I just share some funny anecdotes? Should I feed Dean Khurana quotes on the power of the transformative liberal arts education to ChatGPT and see what comes out? I realized instead that I wanted to talk about something that I've been asked constantly over the past few weeks. Do you have any regrets? It seems to be one of those questions that's persistently on our minds, especially as graduating seniors and especially as the near the end.

So, what do I regret? Dropping my tray in Annenberg on the very first day of school, confessing my love for a girl and getting friend [inaudible 00:09:02], driving 15 hours down to North Carolina to play in a Frisbee tournament where we lost basically every single game we played. Honestly, not a bit. You know what? I was just having fun, looking back and laughing. Laughing often at myself is really fun. But here's something that I do regret. Failing to be more present. When I was a kid, focus came so naturally. I could literally entertain myself for hours on end, just making silly faces at myself in the mirror. My life back then was objectively not interesting. No wondering who's going to end up together on The Bachelor. No waiting with bated breath to see how much money I got back from the IRS that year.

But my life was interesting because I paid total attention to it. Everything that happened to me, I was completely present for. And now, I honestly can't remember the last class I took where I sat through just half the class without checking my email or my phone. Sorry, Mom and Dad, I promise your tuition money is being well-spent in other ways. My church leaders tell me that Harvard students are like octopus sporting large heads and egos with so many tentacles reaching into different professional and social opportunities, anxiously thinking about what's next.

There's a certain cyclical quality to ambition. There's the very real danger that succeeding, whatever that might mean to you will take up your whole life, while the big questions about God, and love, and purpose, and friendship go completely unanswered. 22 years of life later, and I finally realized that life is nothing but a succession of present moments, trying to quote, unquote, "use time well," means you're using the present solely as a path to some superior future state. And so, the present moment won't ever feel satisfying in and of itself.

Two very recent incidents illuminated this truth for me. A few weekends ago, I was in San Diego. After a long run along the ocean, I sat down on the rocks to choose a cool picture of my Strava post and to write a clever caption. Cringe, I know. Suddenly, I heard, "Look at the view, young man. Look at the view." I turned to my right, and to my surprise, a homeless man was gesturing to the ocean, and the sun peeking out behind the clouds. Humbled, I sat next to him chatting and looking at the view for the next two hours. It was one of the best mornings that I've ever had.

Just the other day, I was walking to class when I saw the strangest site, there was a crowd of toddlers all touching this one tree in Leverett courtyard. I walked by this tree hundreds of times and never stopped once. I walked closer, confused as to what had entranced them. Turns out the tree's bark was completely smooth. I watched for 15 minutes in amazement as more and more toddlers came and stared with wonderment at this one tree with smooth bark that I completely ignored every single day for the past three years.

Remember, things are always interesting if only we attend to them. And so, I hope and pray that we can all find our smooth bark tree, that we can relearn how to live fully in the world around us. I hope and pray that we can take the time to look at the view and let ourselves be excited about the now. And mostly, I hope and pray that we can put our faith in God and stop living inside our own heads, phonetically plotting our future and paralyzed with anxiety about the things that we cannot control. Let's pray.

Dearly Father, thank you for gathering us here today on this Thursday morning where we can worship you in fellowship with one another. We are so grateful for the opportunity to gather in your name and to seek your presence in our lives. We ask that you bless us as we go out into the world today, guide us with your wisdom, and give us the strength to face the challenges that may come our way. Help us to be a light for others, to spread your love and grace wherever we go. Help us to not be anxious about tomorrow. We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen.

Harriet Lindman:

Please rise in body or spirit for the Lord's prayer. And now, we pray as Jesus talks, saying...

Speaker 6:

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 to temptation, but deliver us from the evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Harriet Lindman:

Please join in singing the hymn, Guide Me, Oh Thou Great Jehovah, number 285.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing).

Harriet Lindman:

And now, as the sun comes out and into this chapel, may the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Go in peace. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.