

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning. Welcome to morning prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. We are continuing with our senior talks, and this morning, we have Gabrielle Landy of Quincy House with us. We're excited for the words she's going to share this morning. Please rise, embody your spirit for our response of Psalm reading, which is number 23 in your black Psalter. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Congregation:

He maketh me lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside still waters.

Elizabeth Propst:

He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in straight paths for his name's sake.

Congregation:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff; they comfort me.

Elizabeth Propst:

Thou prepare us to table before me in the presence of mine enemies, thou hast anointed my head with oil. My cup runneth over."

Congregation:

Surly goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Choir:

(Singing).

Gabrielle Landy:

Good morning. In 1905, the philosopher Oscar Wilde wrote, "Paradox though it is, it is none the less true that life imitates art far more than art imitates life." Wilde's point is counterintuitive. We usually think of artists as creators trying to imitate a landscape or a person or something else from their lives and then sharing their creation with others, but his point is this, life is simply that which we perceive in ourselves and in others and in everything in the world, and because art shapes the way that we perceive things, life only shows up to us through an artistic lens, and in this sense, life imitates art. To give you an example from my own life, last year, I came across Degas' painting The Rehearsal in the Harvard Art Museum.

It depicts a few ballerinas at the rehearsal in a studio, and soon after, I enrolled in a beginner's dance class at the Harvard Dance Center for ballet. Every time I went to class, I couldn't help but picture myself in Degas' painting, of course, with far less skill. My life was showing up to me through the lens of the art that I had come across, and now, I'd like to suggest that we expand Wilde's argument. It's not just art, but the things that we focus our attention on that shape our perceptions of ourselves and the world. College is several years of focusing our attention on many different things, but mainly academics, relationships, and what comes next, and as a scholar of both philosophy and education, I've spent a lot

of time thinking about the question, what is college for, and this morning, I'd like to propose three possible answers.

Now, the first possibility is that college teaches us the art of learning. Here at Harvard, we call our chosen field our concentration because we concentrate and focus so much time on that discipline. After my first philosophy class on philosophy of religion, I was hooked. I chose philosophy because I loved the curiosity it inspired in me to ask life's deepest questions. In senior year and often much earlier, our focus shifts to what comes next, finding a job, and I think that Harvard prepares us really well to become scholars and employees, but as one of my favorite professors used to say, we're more than brains on a stick. So I'd argue that there's more to the purpose of college than the art of learning. The second possibility to consider is that college is where we learn the art of loving.

When you talk to folks at later stages of life, they usually say that the true purpose of college is those lifelong friendships that you make, the people who will show up for you at your wedding one day, maybe the person standing next to you at the altar, and I've been blessed to develop some amazing friendships here. I think of the moment when my friend surprised me for my 21st birthday, or when a bunch of us went to cheer on our friend at the Boston Marathon a couple of weeks ago, but while college gives us this amazing opportunity to find those special people in our lives, it's up to us to answer the important questions about these relationships. What does it mean to be a good friend and what does it mean to love, and so college can't really teach us the art of loving.

And so finally, I'd like to propose an aspirational answer. The true purpose of college that we strive for is to learn the art of living, the art of knowing who we are, what we value, and what we want to create with our lives after college. I think this is what Harvard's mission is getting out when it talks about the transformative power of a liberal arts education. At its core, college is a place that gives us the time and resources to become the artists of our lives. The things we focus our attention on, whether it's amazing classes or close relationships, help us, in the words of another philosopher, to become who we are, and the things we study.

From music to religion, history, biology, give us examples of lives worth living and examples of things worth pursuing. As I think about what the art of living means to me today, it's by no means something I've mastered. It's an ongoing existential and aesthetic project, but the gift that Harvard has given me is the time and tools to begin answering this question, the opportunity for my life to begin to imitate a work of art that's original in my own. So let us take a moment of silence to consider together what kind of art would you like to create with your life? Thank you.

Elizabeth Propst:

Will you join me in a moment of prayer? God, our maker and our redeemer, we give thanks for this morning, for the artful work of your creation we see both in this church and in the world outside. Most of all, we give thanks for the seniors who have blessed this space with their words and their wisdom over the course of the last few weeks and we give thanks for the love and the sacred and joyful uncertainty that they bear with them as they prepare to walk out into the world. Amen.

Please rise, 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 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.

Please join in our closing hymn, love is kind and suffers long, number 331 in your crimson hymnal.

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Congregation:

Singing).

Elizabeth Propst:

Christ has no hands in this world but your hands, no voice in this world but your voice. May our hands and our voices do the work of justice and of love today and all days. Amen.