

The Rev Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Morning.

The Rev Matthew Potts:

Welcome back to the Appleton Chapel here in the Memorial Church for our daily service of morning prayers. Our speaker this morning is the 30th president of Harvard University, Claudine Gay. I invite you please to rise for our responsorial, Psalm number 24, which can be found in your black psalter.

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it.

Congregation:

For He has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers.

The Rev Matthew Potts:

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord and who shall stand in His holy place?

Congregation:

Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.

The Rev Matthew Potts:

They will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from the God of their salvation.

Congregation:

Such is the company of those who seek Him, who receive the grace of the God of Jacob.

The Rev Matthew Potts:

Lift up your heads, oh gates, and be lifted up, oh ancient doors, that the king of glory may come in.

Congregation:

Who is the king of glory, the Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle?

The Rev Matthew Potts:

Lift up your heads, oh gates, and be lifted up, oh ancient doors, that the king of glory may come in.

Congregation:

Who is this king of glory? The Lord of hosts. He is the king of glory.

Choir:

Singing

Claudine Gay:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Claudine Gay:

Ever since I took office, people have been curious about who I am. Not in the usual ways, not in the ways a CV could communicate the arcs and contours of my academic career, not in the ways a biographical sketch could fill in the blanks. People are curious about who I am, what matters to me. Because you are here this morning, I want to share something with you that almost no one knows. I want to tell you about my very brief career in reality television.

Now, when this happened, it wasn't yet called reality television. It was called Romper Room. The premise, if you are unfamiliar with the program, was simple. It was preschool aged children singing songs, playing games, and learning lessons with the help of a cheerful and compassionate teacher. There was also a bumblebee, Mr. Do-Bee, who modeled good manners. And for 41 years, yes, 41 years, this program delighted young learners, including myself, across the United States. So it was 1975 and I had just turned five and was very excited to soon be heading to kindergarten. My family lived in Georgia at the time, and my mother somehow had landed me a spot on Romper Room.

That Monday morning we arrived at our local television station and I took my place with the other children and things got off to a good start. I could sing songs, I could play games. I could definitely learn lessons. Thanks to my parents, my manners were impeccable, for a five-year-old, of course. Then the puppet show began. At first I was enthralled sitting very still as the story unfolded before me, but my curiosity soon begged questions. "How are these things moving? What was happening back there beyond the curtains? What wasn't I seeing?" So I began to wriggle in my seat and eventually I left my seat and went backstage, and my cheerful and compassionate teacher intervened and I was returned to my seat and I was returned to my seat again and again and again. Even unscripted local television has its limits, and with good humor and truly no hard feelings, I was ejected from Romper Room.

I had forgotten most of this episode until earlier this year. My mother, Claudette Gay, passed away just before commencement and soon after, I found myself sorting through things that she had saved over the course of her rich, rich life and I found tucked among her papers, actually it was right next to her college diploma, my Romper Room diploma, affirming that I was ... and actually I brought it today. I was, and I quote "At all times a good Do-Bee." Here it is. This object is one of my mom's belongings, and the object is also evidence of my mother's belonging. I think of her, an immigrant woman, less than a decade into her life in the United States, a young mother, a college student, navigating an unfamiliar landscape for the sake of an opportunity for her daughter. I think of the time and effort she must have devoted to getting me on that show in the first place and I think of her pride and her joy and her achievement and my achievement.

This is my first day of school without my mother and I share her with you to celebrate her and also so that you may come to know me better. So who am I? Obviously you can read it right here, I'm a good Do-Bee and I hope to be a great colleague to all and a great leader for all. How did I get here? Propelled by belief in the power of education, the power of curiosity and ideas, the power of attentive and industrious work instilled in me by my mother and father, nurtured in me by my teachers and my mentors.

When I helped at move-in day last week, I loved seeing families who had never set foot on our campus before, who had never really even been here or anywhere like here, and I loved seeing parents and siblings sporting their Harvard gear, brimming with pride and joy at their newfound association with this place and all that it means in the world. I thought about those belongings, about their belonging, and it reminded me of just how much our work and this place matter for more lives than we can count. Harvard is not just for her students, not just for the people who are fortunate enough to be considered members of our community. Our reach, our embrace, our obligation is wider than that and can and should be wider still.

Each of us has a hand in deepening the connection between our mission and our society, and that connection is what matters to me, and every year brings fresh opportunity to renew that commitment. Thank you for sharing this time with me this morning, and welcome to the first day of school and welcome to a new semester.

The Rev Matthew Potts:

I invite you please to rise for the prayers.

Almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us in safety to this new day. Preserve us with your mighty power that we may not be overcome by adversity and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen. Now we pray the words Jesus taught us, saying our Father who are 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 singing our concluding hymn, number 27.

Congregation:

(singing)

The Rev Matthew Potts:

Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.