

Henriett Lindeman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Henriett Lindeman:

And welcome to Morning Prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Sonja Johnson-Yu, one of our Choral Fellows and PhD candidate in computer science. Welcome. Please rise in body or in spirit for a responsive reading of Psalm 130, found in your black psalter. "Out of the depths I have called to you, O 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?"

Henriett Lindeman:

"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."

Henriett Lindeman:

"My soul waits for you, more than sentries for the morning, more than sentries for the morning."

Congregation:

"O Israel, wait for our God, for with God, there is mercy."

Henriett Lindeman:

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

Choir:

(Singing).

Sonja Johnson-Yu:

Today's inspired text comes from Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman. "I loafe and invite my soul, I lean and loafe at my ease, observing a spear of summer grass." Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Sonja Johnson-Yu:

As it's still September, I want to share a back to school story with you, from when I was five years old. It was the second week of first grade at my new school. I tested into this program called Quest at a local

elementary school. The first week had gone fairly well. Each morning, my mom and I would go down to the bus stop. A gruff, country music loving school bus driver named Jim would come pick me up, and I'd always sit in the front row with my new best friends, Stella and Julian.

Now, in the second week, it was my dad's turn to take me to the bus stop. He and I both have quite a bit of travel anxiety about missing the bus, the plane, the train, so you can bet we were down at that bus stop nice and early. A bus pulled up to the usual stop and opened its doors. A blonde woman shouted "Quest!" And waited for me to board. It wasn't Jim, but with my dad's encouragement, I scaled the steep steps of the bus. And then I looked to my left and someone was in my seat. I looked to my right; someone was in Julian's seat. So, I just picked my way deeper into the bus, through the throng of unfamiliar big kids, and sat towards the back.

I spent the bus ride resting my head against the window, and trying to peer out the foggy glass. And then we turned into the bus lane in the school parking lot, and paused in front of the building. Kids started scrambling off, but my stomach dropped. Something was seriously off. I didn't belong here. The bus driver noticed I was still lurking in the back of the bus, and she came back to check to see what was going on. "What's wrong?" "This isn't my school." I couldn't hold in the tears any longer. "Can you help me?"

So, it turns out that there was another Quest bus that left the same bus stop 10 minutes earlier than mine, but it just went to a different school. So that day I just went to the wrong school. Oops. And my mom has never let my dad live that one down. But in the end, thanks to this great bus driver, I made it back to my school.

So in this case, it was fairly straightforward for me to tell that I wasn't in the right place. I knew where I belonged, and I could tell that this wasn't it. But now that I'm a big kid, or grown up, I found it much, much harder to tell where I belong. Last school year was really hard for me, and that's to be expected, to a certain extent, for second year PhD students, because we are expected to publish a lot of research projects or... Okay, there we go. Because we're expected to work on these research projects that are used for our qualifying exams. But I struggled to get my research published. And as I was going through that, I couldn't tell if it was that I wasn't cut out for the PhD, or that I just wasn't working on the right problems. My days and my weekends, they just blended together into this unending cycle of the grind. And it was on U Choir tour in Paris last May that the cycle finally halted for me... As did the microphone.

In Paris, we sat in the grass among tiny, white daisies, and munched on baguettes. I walked along the Seine and marveled at the gleaming swans. We wandered the shaded cemeteries, we biked the quiet nighttime streets, laughing in the midnight air. We talked. I loafed. And in doing so, I invited my soul. It was there that I realized that in my work life, I wasn't where I belonged. I needed to pivot my dissertation. It's there that I cried, and it's there where I began to ask for help. Sometimes it's obvious that you're in the wrong place, like when you end up at the wrong school. But I think most of the time it's not that obvious. And you have to make clarity for yourself by making time for discernment.

Today marks the holiest day of the Hebrew calendar, Yom Kippur, and it's a day of atonement. For reflecting on what wrong you've done. Reflecting, "This isn't the person I want to become." Of course, we don't have to wait once a year to do this. This is why we have Sabbath. This is why we have rest. It's rest that helps us realize this isn't where I belong, this isn't who I want to be. It's rest that provides a haven for us to cry. It's rest that invigorates us to seek help. From loafing in Paris, I could finally see the blades of summer grass grow. From loafing, I myself became a growing blade of grass. The mother of clarity is rest.

Henriett Lindeman:

Please rise, in body or in spirit, for prayer. O loving God, we lift up our voices to you as we gather together in your presence today, finding and creating belonging with one another, taking space to pause, step back, breathe, and reimagine our way forward. And now let us pray as Jesus taught, saying, "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 trespassed against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever 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 trespassed against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

Henriett Lindeman:

Let us sing the hymn All My Hope on God is Founded, number 277.

Congregation:

(Singing).

Henriett Lindeman:

One announcement before we leave. So, this coming Friday, the 29th, as some of you know, will be the inauguration of the university's new president. Unfortunately, this does mean that only those with a Harvard ID will be able to access the Yard. So while we will be having the Morning Prayers as usual, you will not be able to physically enter the space without an ID, but we will be streaming the service online and hope that you will join us virtually, if not in person, and we will return to the usual schedule after that. Thank you for your understanding. And now, as we leave this place, the peace of God be in your heart, the love of God be in your hands, and the joy of God be in your soul. Go in peace. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.