

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. We are blessed to have Roddy Emely, a senior at Harvard College, joining us as our speaker this morning. Please rise and embody your spirit for our responsive Psalm, which is number 62 in your black Salter. For God alone my soul waits in silence. From him comes my salvation.

Audience:

He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress. I shall not be greatly moved.

Elizabeth Propst:

For God alone, my soul waits in silence. For my hope is from him.

Audience:

He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress. I shall not be greatly moved.

Elizabeth Propst:

On God rests my deliverance and my honor. My mighty rock, my refuge is God.

Audience:

Trust in him at all times, O people. Pour out your heart before him. God is a refuge for us.

Elizabeth Propst:

Men of low estate are but a breath. Men of high estate are a delusion. In the balances, they go up. They are together lighter than a breath.

Audience:

Put no confidence in extortion. Set no vain hopes on robbery. If riches increase, set not your heart on them.

Elizabeth Propst:

Once God has spoken, twice have I heard this, that power belongs to God.

Audience:

And that to thee, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For thou dost requite a man according to his work.

Roddy Emely:

My reading this morning is from John O'Donohue's Book of Blessing, To Bless the Space Between Us. It's for absence. May you know that absence is full of tender presence and that nothing is ever lost or forgotten. May the absences in your life be full of eternal echo. May you sense around you the secret elsewhere which holds the presences that have left your life. May you be generous in your embrace of loss. May the soar of your grief turn into a well of seamless presence.

May your compassion reach out to those we never hear from. And may you have the courage to speak out for the excluded ones. May you become the gracious and passionate subject of your own life. May you not disrespect your mystery through brutal words or false belonging. May you be embraced by God in whom dawn and twilight are one. And may your longing inhabit its deepest dreams within the shelter of the great belonging. Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning.

Roddy Emely:

Earlier this week when I was thinking about what to say this morning, I pulled out this Book of Blessings by John O'Donohue. And I remember hearing this specific prayer for absence about a year and a half ago here at Morning Prayers. I was actually gifted this book completely coincidentally later that year, and this is one of those books for me that's followed me wherever I go and has stayed with me since that talk. And I was grateful to come across it this week because absence has been something that's been weighing quite heavily on my heart recently.

My grandmother passed away a couple of weeks ago, and losing a loved one creates this vast absence in the map of our lives. My grandparents, especially my grandmothers, have always been sorts of north stars for me. A type of home that's always on the map. A place you might not visit all the time, but you know you can always return to. I love my grandmother deeply, but she was a tough and complicated woman like so many of us are. She was independent. She was fiery.

She was an old Finnish woman who could not wait to tell you what she thought. She was probably not even four foot 10, but she was very feisty. If it was more than a week since you'd called her, she would let me know, "Roddy, you could call more often," and I would say, "Of course, I will, Nana. I promise." She could sometimes be unkind when she was scared, like so many of us, and slow to forgive. But she was incredibly generous. She was an incredible nurse. And I've seen few people love someone else the way she loved my grandfather, her husband of over 60 years.

My grandfather passed away about eight years ago, and she would often talk about wanting to be with him again. And as I got older, she would talk about death more often. Ever since I can remember, whenever we'd talk about the future, she'd always caveat, "Well, if I'm still around," which of course, my family and I would always say, "Nana, you're going to be around. Don't say that," because she felt like an almost permanent fixture in our lives. And I think grandparents can be like that for grandchildren.

These things we've always known that have always been there and because of that feel like they always will be. But of course, human beings are not permanent fixtures and our blessed time on this earth is limited. And she was 93. She was sick, and she began to decline over the summer, until it was clear that her time was coming. And she was able to die as I think so many of us hope, married to the love of her life with her family and her loved ones at her side. But in losing her, I felt this aching absence.

For me, it's more than just an absence of losing one person, the matriarch of our family, the woman who was my grandmother. It feels like a loss of the connection to the past. For her funeral service, my sister and I went through her photo albums to make a slideshow, and there were dozens of them from the

1940s until earlier this year. And I realized for the first time how she really truly connected our family. She bore witness to all of us. And with her death, I feel the grief that she no longer can.

But I keep thinking about this first line from John O'Donohue's Blessing, may you know that absence is full of tender presence and that nothing is ever lost or forgotten. I love that phrase, tender presence. When I first heard this blessing here at Morning Prayers, it shifted how I thought about absence. So often with grief, there's this yearning for wholeness. It feels like absence has broken something, but I think this blessing reminds us that there is a presence too in absence, and it was her ability to express love to us at the end that showed me that this was true.

I always remember that it was hard for her to express love, to be affectionate sometimes. Yet what had always seemed infrequent became more frequent as she came closer to death. And by the end, I think she was at peace, and I think she knew she was loved, and we certainly knew that she loved us. And what a true gift that is in her absence to hold onto. And I think that's what grief can teach us. That in our longing for what's lost, we can find the blessing of the love that we've been given.

And we can remember that in this precious life, the love we give away outlast everything, even death. And so here are the words from John O'Donohue once more. May you be generous in your embrace of loss. May the soar of your grief turn into a well of seamless presence. May it be so. May we make it so. Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

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. 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 number 278.