

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. We are blessed to have with us this morning Luis Pabon Rico, a Ferris Chorus fellow here and a beloved member of our church community. Please rise, embody your spirit for our responsive Psalm, which is number 27 in your black Psalter. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?

Congregation:

When evildoers assail me, uttering slanders against me, my adversaries and foes, they shall stumble and fall.

Elizabeth Propst:

Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

Congregation:

One thing have I ask for the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

Elizabeth Propst:

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high upon a rock.

Congregation:

Give me not up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.

Elizabeth Propst:

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Congregation:

Wait for the Lord, be strong, and let your heart take courage. Yea, wait for the Lord.

Luis Pabón Rico:

Thank you, choir. Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Luis Pabón Rico:

Growing up in the church, I got used to reciting and singing the Book of Psalms, a practice that has since become a cherished part of my spiritual journey. Psalm 27, the text we just read together, has always ranked among my favorites. Yet there is one verse in particular that has never left my mind. It reads, "What thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple." Here the Psalmist has one request, a special one she's determined to seek. Dwelling, beholding, inquiring. And it is this last verb, to inquire, that strikes me every time, especially because its context is often interpreted as alluding, not only to this life, but to the afterlife as well, bringing forth a resonance with other well-known Bible passages, namely Psalm 23, which ends in, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The idea of afterlife, I was taught of heaven, paradise. The next dimension was always clouded with mystery, but a mystery framed with the promise of being reunited with loved ones and dwelling in a place of eternal rest and blissful peace. The conclusion of the hard and laborious life. Indeed, rest was equated with a conception of finitude that seems to contradict the idea of heaven as a place for inquiry. In any case, it would be a place that would hold all the answers. So why keep inquiring? Questions can in fact bring feelings of impermanence, of movement, sometimes of insecurity. They can be especially scary when we're faced with silence as the answer. Jesus in fact, only answered directly a handful of questions he was asked, and his answers often left his listeners bewildered both in the first century and today. Maybe it is the scholar in me, but I am quite tempted by this idea of an afterlife with questions.

I think, therefore I am. I inquire, therefore I exist, but I do not see this exactly as a matter of whether we will continue to exist, but a matter of how. It is a new panorama of possibility that I can imagine precisely because of the prospect of inquiry. At this point, it might seem like I'm taking a sharp left, but I'm actually not here to talk about death, but about life. If we go back to the verse, it seems as if these three verbs, dwelling, beholding, inquiring, are being conflated into one word and suddenly point to the same idea that of living. Maybe life is all about dwelling with questions, and I've come to find solace in this. So I'd like to share with you briefly about a stage in my life when I was contemplating many scenarios and all I had were questions. The first time I attended morning prayers was last year on March 1st during my campus visit, and that is a beautiful and funny story that I will share some other time in more detail.

But I would like to say this, after a beautiful anthem performed in Welsh by Beth Fellows and an inspiring address, I was elated to hear, we would sing one of my favorite hymns, Guide me O Thy Great Redeemer. It tells of a traveler feeling weak and journeying through a lifeless land. She finds her strength in God and asks for direction and provision for her voyage. However, she doesn't exactly ask for answers or understanding. Guidance here doesn't quite entail revelation. Even if her anxious fears are subsided as the hymn reads, that does not mean these will vanish altogether. In short, the questions remain. I am not saying that the process of seeking is one that is done in vain, but we soon realized that all acts of seeking and all answers we may encounter inevitably lead to more questions. Life is this beautiful process.

As we started singing the hymn, a myriad of emotions overwhelmed me. I don't know what was going on, but for a minute there, I was transported to different moments in my life of tribulation and joy, moments where life's questions really hit me hard. And just as God had held out her hand, in those moments of seeking and uncertainty, I was once again feeling God's hand right there with me. That morning of March, I sang my heart out. Joy overcame me. I felt courageous. That short 15 minute service did it for me. At 8:45 AM, I had unknowingly decided I would come to Harvard and I left resolute

to audition for the choir. That dream also came true. In true existential fashion, my life questions didn't get answered at that moment by act of magic; most of them were left unanswered and they remain so. But I'm also reminded that I'm not alone in this. Not only is God with me, but there's a community right here, right now also holding my hand.

So now I invite you to join the Psalmist in this quest of seeking the dwelling place of the truth that calls you forth, to behold its beauty and to continue inquiry. These are at the very heart of living, and I also invite you to join the hymn writer to seek guidance, to hold onto the truths that speaks to you, and to take that leap in your sacred journeys across the river and lose yourself in this life for the next, in the wonder of inquiry and possibility ahead. Thank you.

Elizabeth Propst:

Will you join me in prayer? Holy one, in the world around us, in our own lives, so often we look for you and do not see you, and yet we want to behold you. We want to dwell with you, and we know that if we want those things, then we must seek them out. Be with us, strengthen us, steady us on our search. 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 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, forever and ever. Amen. Please join in our closing hymn, number 285.

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

Congregation:

Amen.