

Harriet Lindeman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Harriet Lindeman:

And welcome to Morning Prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Juan Duran, a master of divinity candidate at Harvard Divinity School. Welcome.

Please rise in body or in spirit for responsive reading of Psalm 63 found in your black psalter.

God, You are my God; I search for You, my soul thirsts for You, my body yearns for You, as a parched and thirsty land that has no water.

Congregation:

I shall behold You in the sanctuary, and see Your might and glory.

Harriet Lindeman:

Truly Your faithfulness is better than life; my lips declare Your praise.

Congregation:

I bless you all my life. I lift up my hands in your name.

Harriet Lindeman:

I am sated as with a rich feast, I sing praises with joyful lips.

Congregation:

When I call You to mind upon my bed, when I think of You in the watches of the night.

Harriet Lindeman:

For You are my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I shout for joy.

Congregation:

My soul is attached to You; Your right hand supports me.

Harriet Lindeman:

May those who seek to destroy my life enter the depths of the earth.

Congregation:

May they be gutted by the sword; may they be prey to jackals.

Harriet Lindeman:

But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by Him shall exult, when the mouth of liars is stopped.

(singing)

Juan Duran:

Rescue me, oh God, for the waters have come to my neck. I sink in the slimy depths and there is no foothold. I have come into deep waters and the streams flow over me. I grow weary in my crying. My throat is hoarse. My eyes grow dim waiting for my God. They are many, like the hairs of my head, those who hate me for no reason. Numerous are those who would destroy me, my enemies who lie. That which I did not steal, now I must return? Psalm 69 verses two to five.

Being queer is in many ways a joyous experience. Because understanding a part of yourself, as painful and complicated as that part may be, is good. It is one of the first steps towards embracing ourselves as we are. And the beautiful part of that is that once we start embracing ourselves with our complicated queer aspects, people start to embrace us differently in a more genuine way, because we ourselves are being more genuine with them.

Being queer is a journey with many occasions of joy, compassion, and most certainly, love. But also, being queer is tiring. That is a part that I feel we leave out of the pride speeches, out of social media posts, out of our classrooms. Being queer can be an exhausting and painful experience as well. As any human condition, being queer is rarely simple and straightforward. There is a very specific pain though, that comes with being queer. It is the pain of being genuine about who you are, and being rejected for nothing else but the fact that you are who you are. And in a world that is not made for queer people, one finds this rejection in the most inconspicuous of places; in bureaucracy, supermarket aisles, in email headers, in sections and textbooks, even in the words of friendly mouths.

So one day, when I was feeling this exhaustion deeply, I turned to the Bible. As someone who is not really religious but that loves and studies the Bible, this was not something I was used to doing. Also, there is an assumption that the Bible does not speak to experiences. And I believed that for a time. I definitely did not turn to it for solace, but I thought, "People do it all the time. Why can't I?" So I did. And I stumbled upon Psalm 69, and those first few verses that I read to you a moment ago, they made me stop on my tracks and cry. I felt seen and acknowledged in a way that I had never felt before. "That which I did not steal, now I must return?", asks the psalmist. These words fell on my stomach like bricks. I had found in the Bible the exact language I needed to understand the pain I was feeling.

Embracing our queerness is not easy, and it takes a lot of work and effort. And yet, there are days where it feels as if the world was demanding you to reject yourself, to undo the work. Those are the days where being queer is especially hard and tiring. That which I did not steal, now I must return? At the end of Psalm 69, because I did finish reading after crying, the psalmist tells us, "Let the oppressed see and rejoice. Those seeking God, He will be in your hearts. For the Lord hears the needy, and the prisoners He does not despise." And that is a message I needed to hear. There is hope. There will be justice. You will be heard.

While this Psalm is probably not about being queer, it's perfectly spoke to a queer pain that I needed acknowledged, and it comforted me in the way that I needed to be comforted. And no one can take that away from me. That which I did not steal, I will not return.

Harriet Lindeman:

Please rise, in body and spirit in prayer. Creator God, we gather together to ask for your blessing, to celebrate the wholeness and beauty of all of your beloved children. Help us each to find rest, to find joy, to find safety. To find ourselves reflected in your words and in your world. Amen.

Juan Duran:

Amen.

Harriet Lindeman:

And now, let us pray the Lord's prayer saying...

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 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.

Harriet Lindeman:

Let us sing the hymn, We Gather Together to Ask the Lord's Blessing. Number 27.

(singing)

And now, as we prepare to leave this place, the peace of God be in your heart, the love of God be in your hands, the joy of God be in your soul. Go in peace. Amen.