

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. We are excited to have Aidan Scully, a junior at Harvard College, speaking with us this morning. Welcome, Aidan.

Please rise in body or spirit and join in our responsive Psalm, which is number 90 in your black Psalter.

Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to another.

Congregation:

Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and the earth were born, from age to age, you are God.

Elizabeth Propst:

You turn us back to the dust and say, "Go back, O child of Earth."

Congregation:

For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night.

Elizabeth Propst:

You sweep us away like a dream. We fade away suddenly like the grass.

Congregation:

In the morning it is green and flourishes, in the evening it is dried up and withered.

Elizabeth Propst:

When you are angry, all our days are gone. We bring our years to an end like a sigh.

Congregation:

The span of our life is 70 years, perhaps in strength even 80, yet the sum of them is but labor and sorrow, for they pass away quickly and we are gone.

Elizabeth Propst:

Who regards the power of your wrath? Who rightly fears your indignation?

Congregation:

So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.

Aidan Scully:

My friends, good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Aidan Scully:

From the Symposium of Plato.

"Suppose Hephaestus, with his instruments, to come to the pair who are lying side by side and to say to them, 'What do you people want of one another?' They would be unable to explain. And suppose further, that when he saw their perplexity, he said, 'Do you desire to be wholly one, always day and night to be in one another's company for if this is what you desire, I am ready to melt you into one and let you grow together.' There's not a man of them who when he heard the proposal, would deny or would not acknowledge that this meeting and melting into one another, this becoming one instead of two was the very expression of his ancient need. And the reason is that human nature was originally one and we were a whole and the desire and pursuit of the whole is called love."

For as long as I can remember, I've been interested in the ancient world, the stories told by people 2000 years ago, the ways they lived, how they understood their place in the cosmos. And for as long as I can remember, my favorite things to learn were the stories that revealed these ancient people's humanity. The birthday invitations, the letters to parents letting them know you've landed safely, the complaints about those people at the gym who flatter you in the hopes that you'll invite them to a dinner party, classic human stuff.

But as I began to grapple with what I can now identify as my bisexuality in a high school, I found myself unconsciously looking for something else, something that spoke not just to a general humanity, but to my humanity in particular. I found the story of Hadrian who had his lover Antinous deified and identified a star in the sky as his lover smiling down on him from above. I found the story of Metrobius, an actor, and to quote the historian Plutarch, "Impersonator of women," who loved the dictator Sulla and accompanied him into retirement. I found the story of Patroclus, whose death on the battlefield drove Achilles into such a violent rage that the gods needed to descend to earth, to intervene. And I found the story of the origin of love in Plato's Symposium.

In the Symposium, an odd collection of leading Athenians are asked their beliefs about love. The comedian Aristophanes says that we used to be double humans with four legs, four arms, and two faces. The children of the sun were double men, the children of the earth were double women, and the children of the moon were half man and half woman. When we became too powerful, the gods feared that we would rebel and so Zeus split us all in two. But we never forgot our ancient union and so the children of the sun seek other men, the children of the earth seek other women, and the children of the moon seek each other, and as our reading from the Symposium said, it is this pursuit of the whole which we call love. There it was 2,400 years ago, queer love.

Nowadays, my relationship to these texts is more complicated. There was no utopia for people in antiquity. Queerness was more often than not used as an insult against those who did not fit neatly into strict social mores of gender and sexuality. Things worsened as the Mediterranean Christianized, with early church fathers condemning queerness and queerness becoming punishable by death under the emperors of the fourth century. Even Aristophanes's description of love seems to be the object of mockery and the Symposium, and yet it's still there.

Reading about the hate that was directed against people with whom I identify is never easy, and yet it is an enduring reminder that we existed even then, that our kind has survived, that there have been

people who haven't fit in and have been living as their full selves for eons, whatever it may have cost them. I see myself in their oppressor's hatred because their hatred is futile. It's empty. It has been trying to destroy us for millennia, and it has failed over and over again in every generation, in every corner of the world, and for all their vitriol, here we are. Here we are still. To call that hatred homophobia or transphobia is accurate. There's less hatred than fear, but should we be surprised that they fear us? In the Symposium, Aristophanes tells us that our love scared the gods. Mere mortals never stood a chance.

That passage from the Symposium that I opened with is about two men, two men whose love for each other is too deep to describe. Our species has always known that love is what brings us closer to the divine, and our species has never understood love as just something for one man to share with one woman. We are not that narrow. We never have been.

I invite you to join me in the spirit of prayer and meditation for my Unitarian Universalist tradition. Divinity that resides in each of us, it is through your works, through us, that we know you. From our many sects, we are one species, from our many creeds, we are one collective, from our many backgrounds, we are one blood. Hatred is human, nothing more. Fear is human, nothing more. Love is human, and yet it is so much more. It is our sacred duty, it is our ancient need. May we love recklessly and with abandon, for we go this way, but once, blessed be, and amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please rise in body or 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 307.

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.