

Henriett Lindeman :

Good morning, and welcome to Morning Prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Ellen K. Williams, the President of the Kisoro Children's Foundation, and former Assistant Professor at Harvard Medical School. Please rise in body and in spirit for responsive reading of Psalm 136, found in the Black Psalter.

Oh, give thanks unto the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

Oh, give thanks unto God for us, for His mercy and endureth forever.

Henriett Lindeman :

Oh, give thanks to the Lord of Lords, for His mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

To Him alone, doeth great wonders, for His mercy endureth forever.

Henriett Lindeman :

To Him that by wisdom made the heavens, for His mercy endureth forever

Congregation:

To him that stretches out the earth above the waters, for His mercy endureth forever.

Henriett Lindeman :

To Him that made great lights, for His mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

The sun rules by day, for His mercy endureth forever.

Henriett Lindeman :

The moon and stars to rule by night, for His mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

And hath redeemed us from our enemies; for His mercy endureth forever.

Henriett Lindeman :

Who giveth food to all flesh, for His mercy endureth forever.

Congregation:

Oh give thanks unto the God of heavens: for His mercy endureth forever.

Ellen K. Williams:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Ellen K. Williams:

Thanks so much to David and to the choir for that beautiful music. As I was sitting there, I need special thanks to the choir this morning, because it gives new meaning on this Monday after Thanksgiving preaching to the choir, because you're more than half of us who are assembled here this morning, so thanks for getting up to be here.

My reading is from Matthew 25: "Then the righteous will answer him, 'When did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you? Or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the king will answer: 'Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me.'"

Many of you may have seen the boxes at church asking for donations of baby clothes, or perhaps you've seen it in the church newsletter. Courtney asked me if I could come speak about this project not to ask you to donate, though I am grateful if you do, but rather to explain what this is all about.

I run a small charity that works in Kisoro, Uganda, a district that is among the poorest areas of an incredibly poor country. The babies born in Kisoro start life with many of the factors that have historically made people least in the eyes of the world: born in the global south, born in a rural area, born into poverty, born black. This clothing project is about doing a small thing for these children. The least of these are brethren.

Many people might wonder, why are we doing such a small thing for people who live so far away? Is it really useful? Why not just send money? Why not do something closer to home? Why not buy the clothes there?

All of these are good questions with complicated answers, but the short answer is because I was asked to do it. At that point, the theory of whether this was the one best thing to do with time or money no longer seemed quite as relevant. I could either say yes or I could say no.

All of the projects in Kisoro have happened because lots of individuals have been willing to say yes: yes to gifts of dignity, of education, of changed life trajectories; yes to gifts that make people feel hopeful, feel loved, and feel cared about by people who live in a different social universe.

Most of our projects relate to the education of children, but we try to respond when we get asked to address a specific need in Kisoro. We have no employees and no overhead, so 100% of what we raise goes to our projects there.

We try to respect what caregivers and community members are asking for, rather than telling them they need something different. Virtually all of the 3000 babies who were born each year at the public hospital in Kisoro are born to mothers too poor to afford diapers of any sort. These women still need to have a few disposable diapers for a special occasion, a medical appointment, a wedding, a funeral, or to use for a hospitalized infant.

We were asked if we might donate enough diapers so that every mother could go home with a package of diapers for these occasions. When one of my colleagues in Uganda delivered the diapers, she was asked if you might ever consider donating baby clothes.

Most of the mothers come to the hospital with nothing, and they literally tear apart old fabric to have something to wrap their baby in to go home. The head nurse said that it was discouraging for the midwives who deliver the babies, and humiliating for the mothers, who feel they have nothing to offer the babies.

The clothes are a gift of dignity for both the mothers and the midwives who have cared for them. When I presented the idea of a baby clothes drive to the children at the church school, I told them that I hoped they learned two things from working on it.

The first is the power of inspiring other people to help you accomplish a goal that you would never be able to accomplish alone. The second is the power of doing even a small thing for someone else, since, for each set of baby clothes they collect, there will be a baby who leaves the hospital clothed, and a baby whose mother feels cared for and who experiences a bit more dignity at the start of her baby's life.

Whenever I am in Kisoro, people I know, people I don't know, even strangers on the street, stop me to say, "Thank you for loving us." When these clothes reach the babies in Kisoro, that will be the message from their moms: "Thank you for loving us."

In the end, that is what saying yes is all about: being willing to act out of love for another human being who needs that love in whatever form it may be. We know you can't fix all the problems in the world, or even very many of them, but you can at times fix the ones that are right in front of you.

Henriett Lindeman :

Please rise in body and in spirit, the prayer. Oh God, our creator, be with us on the stage that You have made. Help us to see in which we are connected to all precious life and systems of harm and possibilities for change.

Help us listen to find our place as part of this greater whole, moving towards healing, towards justice, towards transformation. In your name we pray. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Henriett Lindeman :

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 trespass against us. And lead us not to temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever."

Congregation:

Amen.

Henriett Lindeman :

Let us sing the hymn, "Oh, love of God, how strong and true." Number 218.

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