

Harriet Lindeman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Harriet Lindeman:

And welcome to Morning Prayers here in Appleton Chapel. My name is Harriet Lindeman, and I will be your speaker this morning. Stephanie Hollenberg is listed on the place mats, but was not able to be here today. Please rise, in body or in spirit, for reading of Psalm 150. "Hallelujah! Praise God in the holy temple; praise God in the firmament of power."

Congregation:

"Praise God for every mighty act; praise God's excellent greatness."

Harriet Lindeman:

"Praise God with the blast of the ram's horn; praise God with lyre and harp."

Congregation:

"Praise God with the timbrel and dance; praise God with strings and pipe."

Harriet Lindeman:

"Praise God with resounding cymbals; praise God with loud-clanging cymbals."

Congregation:

"Let everything that has breath praise God. Hallelujah."

Choir:

(Singing).

Harriet Lindeman:

"I won't look too far ahead, it's too much for me to take. But break it down to this next breath, this next step, this next choice is one that I can make. So I'll walk through this night, stumbling toward the light, and do the next right thing." I see some nodding, but if you're not familiar with these words, they're sung by Princess Anna in Frozen II, the underrated and underappreciated sequel to Disney's Frozen I, which transformed culture about 10 years ago.

Advent is coming, finals are coming. For me, my last semester at the Divinity School is coming. Winter break is coming. And for me, that means that some time visiting family in New York is coming as well. And I'm definitely looking forward to this, I love my family, and I have been having some struggles with time with my grandfather recently, so I am grateful to have grown up pretty close to him. First, living not far from him in Brooklyn, and then Upstate in New York. And he is a loving, and very intense kind of a man who, more than anyone else in my life, wants to know, and wants to know about 10 years ago, what I'm doing, where I'm going next.

And in a way, that's logical to him. He has led quite a life. He was born in Upstate New York to a very poor farming family. They didn't have their own land, but farmed as tenants on the land of someone else. And he's ending his life in a very nice apartment in Manhattan. And he has spent a lot of his time as a passionate teacher and mentor to younger adults and adults, helping them find their gifts and their voice. And I think he feels this pressure to make sure that I manifest as my best me, and I both love and appreciate that, and we don't always see value in the same places. And the things that I have already done, that feel meaningful, don't always fit into his sense of a story of where my life ought to go. And it's really not that he has one vision, or wants to impose one role for me, but that he wants it to be clear and grand in a way that doesn't always reflect where I'm at.

And several years ago, he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and we're very grateful he's still very much himself, he knows who we are, he knows a lot about his story, but it has increased the sense of urgency, this struggle for him to articulate himself, and this desire to know, before it's too late for him, how it's all going to unfold. And this has led to some kind of face-offs between us. Often I'll arrive, and he'll greet me with a lot of love, and then without much small talk or checking in, it's like, "Okay, and what's next, Harriet? What does it all mean?" And I, being a somewhat private person, ultimately can shut down a little bit at this. And he will affirm, "Really, I just want you to be happy." And recently this conversation looked like him saying, "I just want you to be happy, to do what will make you happy." And I said, "Thank you, [inaudible 00:11:08]." Which is what we call him. And he said, "And it's not working with little kids!" So, that's the kind of place we end up sometimes, at an impasse.

But I've started to ground myself in this wisdom from Princess Anna. Well, really, it's originally received by Princess Anna from this wise troll guy. And he says, "When one can see no future, all one can do is the next right thing." And I've started to ground in this when met with a whole wide range of scopes and situations. Sometimes it's tiny, just sitting down to my laptop, feeling like my to-do list is much too big. Or looking around a messy kitchen, not quite seeing how it's all going to get cleaned, but reminding myself I can do the next right thing. And I think about this when I'm imagining what exactly is the next step beyond graduation, reminding myself I don't have to have the whole path figured out, but I can try to find the next right thing.

And I think it holds wisdom for larger questions beyond just me, too. I think sometimes my difficulty, imagining my own future, is just this reality of living in a chaotic and dynamic world. I think about back to the beginning of COVID, which now feels like quite a while ago, and having this sense, "Okay, I'm supposed to be making decisions for where I go next, and I don't even know what the rest of the world looks like in another month or year." And this reality has been sitting with me for a long time with climate change, trying to imagine, "Where do I want to be?" And not being sure what cities will look like, or where the greatest need will be that I will want to be responding to. I feel this with the times of war and destruction and violence, not knowing where it's all taking us.

And I accept that we cannot go back and undo the destruction that has been done, the ways we've harmed one another and the planet. And we cannot always envision the clear way to justice, to healing, or to safety. Cannot see what awaits us on the other side, if there is one. We can look back at where we have gone wrong, can mourn, and acknowledge our failures. And then I think there's a kind of faith in moving forward, breath by breath, step by step, choice by choice. I'm not sure my grandfather will be satisfied with this framing in a few weeks at Christmas, but I will try to receive his love and his concern moment by moment. Will you pray with me?

O God of love and grace, we trust that you are with us even when we cannot see the way through, cannot see beyond this moment, even when we cannot see you, hear you, reach you. When it all feels too big and murky and unsure, guide us towards the next right thing. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Harriet Lindeman:

Please rise, in body or in spirit, and 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 into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

Congregation:

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Harriet Lindeman:

Let us sing the hymn, Great God We Sing That Mighty Hand, number 73.

Congregation:

(Singing).

Harriet Lindeman:

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.

Congregation:

Amen.