

Harriett Lindeman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Harriett Lindeman:

And welcome to Morning Prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Dr. Aravi Samuel, professor of physics. Welcome. Please rise, in body or in spirit, for a responsive reading of Psalm 18. "I adore you, O Lord, my strength."

Congregation:

"O Lord, my crag, my fortress, my rescuer, my God."

Harriett Lindeman:

"My rock in whom I seek refuge, my shield, my mighty champion, my haven."

Congregation:

"Ropes of death encompassed me, torrents of Belial terrified me."

Harriett Lindeman:

"Ropes of Sheol encircled me; snares of death confronted me."

Congregation:

"In my distress I called on the Lord, cried out to my God; in His temple He heard my voice; my cry to Him reached His ears."

Harriett Lindeman:

"You have given me the shield of your protection. Your right hand has sustained me. Your care has made me great."

Congregation:

"You have let me stride on freely; my feet have not slipped."

Harriett Lindeman:

"For this I sing your praise among the nations, Lord, and hymn your name."

Congregation:

"He accords great victories to His king, keeps faith with His anointed, with David and his offspring forever."

Choir:

(Singing).

Aravi Samuel:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Aravi Samuel:

Thank you for having me. This morning's inspirational quote, pardon me, is from Instagram, a paragraph, a monologue by Christopher Walken. "In life, we try to make connections. Most friends come and go like fireworks; but a few, a precious few, turn our lives up to 11 and keep it there. You have to hold onto friends like that because, like air, you'll miss them when they're gone." I came to Harvard 34 years ago, a freshman. I came from a small town. No one from my town had ever attended Harvard. I only applied because I got an application in the mail. I was thrilled when I got in; I was terrified when I got here. With my small town background, I was overwhelmed. I was small and Harvard was huge, and I missed home.

Before my second year, my brother gave me some advice. "Join a lab," he said. "Join a research lab. You like physics, you might find people that you like." I didn't know anything about research, only about science and textbooks. I randomly looked for professors in the course catalog. Back then, the course catalog was an actual book. I stumbled on a section called "Biophysics". Biophysics sounded less intimidating than actual physics, and biophysics sounded less foreign to me than actual biology. And at the top of that biophysics faculty list was the name Howard Berg. To read more about Howard Berg, I went to Cabot Science Library, when it was an actual library with actual books. I found a little book by Howard called Random Walks in Biology.

Here's not the time to go over a monograph in biophysics, but I discovered, with that book, that Howard Berg was a veritable E. B. White of scientific writing. He didn't write to intimidate or impress, but cleanly, clearly, simply. That book welcomed me, a reader whom that author had never met. I screwed up my courage and I went to his office. And after just a few minutes, really, Howard offered me a job. Someone later told me that Howard had said to them, just after he had met me, "I just met a kid I kind of like." There was no rash reason for this instant affection. I came from nowhere. I had no ability that he didn't already have in spades. Maybe because before Howard came to Harvard, he was also a shy kid from a small place. Iowa, in his case. Maybe I needed the kind of help he knew, firsthand, how to give.

Howard became my teacher. I became his student. I didn't feel like I belonged at Harvard until I belonged in that lab. I spent college, graduate school, postdoc in that lab. And in 2003, I joined the physics department as an assistant professor. Excuse me. We worked and taught alongside each other for 20 more years. When I first met Howard, I didn't know about his huge achievements. I joined that lab drawn by a small book. I stayed because he was my friend. He was my safe harbor in this huge place. In 30 years, I never had to do anything for him. Nothing I could do would add to a career like his. He took care of me for no reason, no quid pro quo, because he had simply grown to love me.

After 30 years, Howard got older. Work got harder. Lab got smaller. Funding got thinner. Two years ago, someone told me that Harvard, this huge place, was going to take Howard's by then small lab away. Time and money had run out. So I called Howard. We had lunch. He told me about his two last postdocs that would soon get him a job. He told me about one more experiment that they wanted to do. And for the first time in 30 years, I was in a position to do something for him. I'd find some money, I'd rehire his people, I'd finish that experiment. And after I told him I would do this, he paused, and he looked at me, and he said just four words. Cleanly, clearly, and simply, he said, "I did something right."

Howard had done so much right in his life. He had discovered so much. He had huge achievements. But in that moment, none of that mattered. What he remembered was something right; were countless acts of kindness that he did for me when I needed him, and he was there for me. And with those four words, he let me be there for him. Just weeks later, just before Christmas, Howard had a bad fall. And just after Christmas, he passed away. Harvard is still a huge place, known mostly for its laurels and ivy-covered walls. But none of that is the "something right" about this place. None of that is the "something right" about any place. What can be right are just simple acts of kindness. Kindness that echoes from generation to generation through these halls. Kindness that turns these halls into our home.

I opened with Instagram, and I close with Wordsworth. "That best portion of a good man's life, his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love." Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Harriett Lindeman:

Please rise, in body or in spirit, for prayer. Creator God, be with us in this season of long nights and short days. Through travel and change, distance and reunions. Help us to find connection, and support, and mentorship to guide us, and help us to know when to reach out and be that person for someone else, to create safety and a sense of home. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Harriett 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 into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. For ever and ever. Amen."

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. For ever and ever. Amen."

Harriett Lindeman:

And let us sing the hymn, O Come, O Come Emmanuel, number 91.

Congregation:

(Singing).

Harriett Lindeman:

Now, as we 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.

This transcript was exported on Dec 04, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

Congregation:

Amen.