

Harriett Lindeman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Harriett Lindeman:

And welcome to morning prayers here at Appleton Chapel. We're glad to have you with us as we begin a week of centering and honoring Black history. Our speaker this morning will be Taylon E. Lancaster, a Master of Divinity student at Harvard Divinity School. Welcome. Please rise in body or in spirit for responsive reading of Psalm 23, found in your black salter.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Congregation:

(Singing).

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

Harriett Lindeman:

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in straight paths for his name's sake.

Congregation:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Harriett Lindeman:

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies: thou has anointed my head with oil; my cup running over.

Congregation:

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

(Singing).

Taylon E. Lancaster:

Good morning to every one of you.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Taylon E. Lancaster:

Would you join me in the word of prayer? Oh God, let the words of my mouth, the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight for you're our strength, our redeemer, our fortress, and our hope. Let us all say amen.

I'll be reading scripture found in the Book of Romans 15th chapter, beginning at the 13th verse. Paul writes these words to the church at Rome. "May the God of hope fill you all with joy and peace and believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." If I had to extract the title or subject this morning, I would like to talk about abounding in hope. I have the blessed privilege of traversing down the highways and byways of Western Massachusetts to the oldest Black Baptist Church known as Third Baptist. Have the honor of serving as senior pastor and as the youngest pastor in the church's 155-year church history. This is not only a privilege, but an invaluable experience in which I share with those that I resonate with most, which are those of African descent. I pastor the those that I see as family. Being that I am a native from Florida, getting beyond the Eiffel Tower of academia, which we call Harvard, has allowed me to be with Black people, or what my grandmother would call your kinfolk, on a consistent basis.

Being amongst my kinfolk have allowed me to resonate, not only with seeing them, but with sitting with them as we sat in the last six months cried and exchanged care between one another to glorify God and show divine love upon the least, the lost and the left out. And even meandering the streets of Springfield or even as I take a scroll down the red brick sidewalks of Harvard Square, I bear witness to the synonymously situated realities of us all, which we have, will, or have experienced, which is the reality of hopelessness. Would everyone say hopelessness?

Congregation:

Hopelessness.

Taylon E. Lancaster:

Hopelessness is no respecter of persons. In fact, you will have to experience hopelessness at one point in your life and wrestle with the posterity of our future and the possibility of its limits. Regardless of your age, race, sexual orientation, background, specifying demographics or faith tradition, all of us will have a hookup with hopelessness. Even as I've dealt with the depths of hopelessness individually, I could not help but think about the communal hopelessness as we are caught in the cultural matrix of hopelessness caused by our interconnectedness, our histories, our thoughts, and even our encounters with oppression. All the more as we've come to celebrate Black history month and the communal struggle of those of African descent, the grit, the tenacity, and the resilience.

May I say today that those of African descent and people of color all across the world have far too long been acquainted with the feeling of hopelessness by way of diabolical systemic devices that attempt to oppress every aspect of Black ontological existence. We've been left hopeless by segregation, hopeless through mechanisms of environmental racism, hopeless by continual hate groups and hate crimes, hopeless because of the educational disparities, hopeless by having to live behind the veil of the white gaze, hopeless due to the school to prison pipeline, hopeless by seeing and being given little access to capital or the opportunity for social economic progression, hopeless because of the codification of laws and policies, hopeless because of the treatment of Black women, hopeless because of the disinvestment in Black infrastructure, hopeless by the unequal access to resources, hopeless to displacement and gentrification, and hopeless by the efforts to erase African-American history.

And despite all that we've survived, we've survived with an everlasting hope. We still have hope because we knew about the God of the oppressed. The father of Black liberation, James Cone said, and I quote, "Bad doesn't have to have the last word. The answer is no. But we all die to despair if we lose hope." And while hopelessness is certain, the great consolation that we share is in this abounding hope that Paul shares to the church at Rome facing religio, social, political barriers and division. By means of hope, he suggests to us that we can navigate the idol of hopelessness in our own individual lives.

My sermon in a sentence this morning is that hope is an eternal tool that allows us to overcome our temporal realities. By means of hope. We can contradict the status quo with spiritual transcendence, righteous discontent that causes blind eyes to see, the death to hear, the forgotten to be recognized, and even those that are oppressed to be set free, those that are naked to be clothed, and the dismayed to be found secure. My clarion call is we assemble in this communion and fellowship is that we may be sure to harken the mantle and mission bestowed upon us by our ancestors, those who fought, bled, and died, so that we may overcome someday.

As we continue to work and strive towards liberation, justice and equality for all, may we utilize the power of prayer that give us the grip to clinging onto the Holy Spirit of hope and the practice of prayer, which causes us to get up off of our needs. I'm reminded of a song that we sing often at the historic Third Baptist Church in Springfield that says that, "Time is filled with swift transitions. Not on earth a move can stand, but build your hopes on things eternal. Hold to God's unchanging hand. My brother, my sister, hold to God's unchanging hand." May God bless you and keep you is my prayer. Would you pray with me?

God, our help and ages passed, our hope for years to come. Our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home at last. God, we've come this morning with grateful hearts, made up minds, willing spirits to abound in your endless hope. May you give us the moral courage and community to spread your love. We celebrate Black History Month, and we bask in the God of our weary ears, the God of our silent tears, and the God who has led us this far along the way. Keep us in your path, oh God, we pray, amen and ashe. Would you recite the Lord's prayer with me?

Our Father, which 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 of daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not in temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Amen.

Harriett Lindeman:

Please rise in body and spirit and let us sing the the hymn Sing my Soul His Wondrous Love, number 225. (Singing).

And now as we prepare to 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.

(Singing).