

Amy Sexauer:

Good morning.

Speaker 2:

Good morning.

Amy Sexauer:

Welcome to the Appleton Chapel here, in our Memorial Church, for our daily service of morning prayers. Our speaker this morning is the Reverend Alanna Sullivan Associate Minister and Director of Administration in the Memorial Church. I invite you to please rise and join me in our responsive Psalm found in your psalter, Psalm 92.

It is good to give thanks to the Lord to sing praises to thy name, O, Most high.

Speaker 2:

To declare your steadfast love in the morning and thy faithfulness at night.

Amy Sexauer:

To the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre.

Speaker 2:

For thou O, Lord, hast made me glad at thy work. At the works of thy hands, I sing for joy.

Amy Sexauer:

The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

Speaker 2:

They are planted in the house of the Lord. They flourish in the courts of our God.

Amy Sexauer:

They still bring forth fruit in old age. They are ever full of sap and green.

Speaker 2:

To show that the Lord is upright. He is not rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Amy Sexauer:

You may be seated.

The Rev. Alanna Sullivan:

Our lesson for today comes from Paul's letter to Ephesians after [inaudible 00:07:13] beginning after each verse. For thy grace, you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing. It is a gift of God, not the result of works so that one may boast. Here is the lesson.

I am blessed to live around the corner from Arnold Arboretum. The Arboretum spans 281 acres in the middle of Boston proper. It's home to thousands of specimens of trees and flowers and bushes from

around the world. My family and I have a weekend ritual of bringing bagels to the park on Saturday mornings, and we meander along winding paths that snake between towering trees and blooming bushes, scraggly shrubs, rock formations that are perfect for a six-year-old to scramble on. This park was meticulously designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, an esteemed landscape architect, as part of Boston's Emerald Necklace, and sometimes while wandering through this maze of pathways, I wonder what Mr. Olmsted and his successors must have taken into some consideration when designing, planning, and selecting these paths.

I, however, also notice some other paths that pop up in the park, and they are not ones that necessarily fold into the meticulous planning or beautification of the arboretum. They look more like brown scars of hard-packed dirt that cut across broom space. I really took notice of one such trail that broke off from one of the main sidewalks when my son began running along one that took him to a soaring oak tree. Visiting this tree subsequently has become part of our Saturday morning ritual. This tree that my son has nicknamed The Magic Tree, has a trunk that is too big to wrap your arms around, a maze of branches, quaking leaves, which a dap of light dances through, and there are plenty of little presence of smooth round acorns that are scattered on the ground.

It's not hard to imagine generations of children running to this Magic Tree, forging their own trails, an offshoot from the established way. And I subsequently have come to find out that there is a name for these informal shortcuts. Landscape architects and urban designers call them Desire Paths or Desire Lines. Desire Paths are the trails that pop up in public space when enough people have taken the same shortcut. So if you've ever found yourself chasing a track of dirt, stepping in sandy tracks on a beach, or pleasing your boots in the snowy footprints of those who traveled before, you have been on a Desire Path.

Now it's a lot of work to design and make a road. There's the surveying, and the designing, and the clearing, and the building, and the pouring, and the smoothing, and the painting. And I wonder what it might feel like when all this work has been done only to have a Desire Path crop up, despite Olmsted and other designers' best intentions for a space. Together, we always find these invisible walkways. And in every space where we live and move, these Desire Paths already exist. So for me, Desire Paths have become a way for me to think about grace. They are there just waiting under the grass, or the sand, or the carpet to be revealed. Invisible at first, but they were there all along, just waiting for us to discover them. And although a Desire Path is already underfoot, like grace, it can only be discovered together. It's through our collective wandering and that they become visible.

God's grace reveals itself in how we stop to witness one another, and how we veer off course to meet one another, and how love leads us to unexpected places. I don't know about you, but I spent much of my life building a road, designing a life leading to a place where I hope to encounter God. I draw the layout, survey the land, pour the concrete step by step, and I believe that if I labor hard enough, and long enough, and well enough, I will eventually reach my goal. I will work my way to God. But the joke's on me, because if I simply look up from where I am in my road making work, there's already a pathway laid out for me. The shortest distance between God's heart and mine. It's as if it was there all long, just waiting for me to discover it.

Will you pray with me? Oh, holy one, lay down my way making tools. Show me the shortcut to me. Amen.

Amy Sexauer:

Will you please rise and join me in saying the prayer that Jesus taught us. Our Father.

Speaker 2:

Our Father.

Amy Sexauer:

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 this temptation. For thine is the kingdom, and power, and glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Please join us in singing our concluding hymn number 304, More Holiness, Give Me.

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you always. Amen.

Speaker 2:

Amen.

Amy Sexauer:

Let us bless the Lord.

Speaker 2:

Blessed be to God.