

Rohan Press:

Good morning.

Congregation:

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Rohan Press:

Welcome to the Appleton Chapel here at our Memorial Church for our daily service of morning prayers.

Our speaker this morning is Rakesh Khurana, Professor of Sociology and Organizational Behavior and Danoff Dean at Harvard College. I feel very grateful to have him with us this morning.

I invite you please to rise and join us in singing our responsorial Psalm, which is Psalm number 100 in your black [inaudible 00:03:24] .

"May all lands be joyful before you, O God, serve you with gladness and come before your presence with a song."

Congregation:

"For we know that you are God; you yourself have made us, and we are yours; we are your people and the sheep of your pasture."

Rohan Press:

We shall enter your gates with thanksgiving, go into your courts with praise, give thanks to you and call upon your name.

Congregation:

"For you are good; your mercy is everlasting; and your faithfulness endures from age to age."

Rohan Press:

You may be seated.

Congregation:

(singing)

Rakesh Khurana:

As we gathered this morning, I'm reminded that fall marks more than beginning of a new academic year here on campus. It's also a season of transitions. Students at the college making the transition from teenagers to young adults in our professional and graduate schools. Students are beginning as novices and taking their first steps towards becoming doctors, scholars, lawyers, societal leaders, ministers preparing themselves for a vocation.

You can feel it everywhere on this campus. Something new. Awe-inspiring, immense, and imponderable is unfolding. The sun quietly cooling as one season transitions into the next casting, a gentle golden glow of the Memorial Church's spires, the new chill in the evening air, a reminder that the past is just a story we tell ourselves and that the only thing that is certain is the future. Something unfixed, something we shape together through learning, dialogue and the shared purpose of searching for Veritas.

For centuries, institutions like Harvard have existed as transitional spaces and in fostering transitions, universities are places of hope, where we engage with both the realities of the world and the infinite possibilities of what the world could become.

We sit at the intersection of the actual, the imagined, creating a bridge between what is and what could be. Harvard and universities like it are places where the future begins every day, not because of the buildings or our traditions, but because of its people. People who confront complexity, challenge assumptions, and expand our understanding of our world, ourselves and others. A place that involves projections and introspections, differentiation and integration, solitude and belonging. Each student, scholar and community member carries within them a fragment of our future shaped by the larger story of humanity unfolding.

As I begin my final year as dean of Harvard College, I'm more acutely aware of the beginnings and transitions all around me. In recent weeks, I have been asked often why I chose this moment to step down and return to teaching and research. The answer is simple. I believe in the importance of transitions, both personally and institutionally.

Change allows us to remain vital, to continue growing and to keep moving forward. It prevents stagnation and encourages innovation. Harvard is built on the idea that we can always do more, always be better, and always look towards the future. I have loved this role more than I could have ever imagined, but if you do your job right, the place can thrive without you. These transitions are moments of change and a reminder of the deep power of renewal. Just as we ask our students to embrace new ideas and challenges, we as leaders must know when to step aside, making space for fresh perspectives and new energy.

There is something profoundly hopeful in choosing to leave while the work is still joyful, in making room for someone new who will continue to build on what we have created. There is a rhythm to life, and in that rhythm there is wisdom both for individuals and institutions.

As I contemplate my own transition, this new year begins with many transitions for my family as well, and also with so much hope. Our oldest became a doctor and married. Our middle daughter has moved to Chicago to start her doctorate, and our youngest graduated from college.

As I reflect on these transitions, it is bittersweet. As a parent, you learn to let go of the people you love most in the world, and if you've done your job right, they will thrive without you. In much the same way, I look forward to watching Harvard continue to thrive and evolve as a source of hope and possibility for generations to come.

The work of this place is never done. The spirit of Harvard is not found in its physical structures, but in the people who fill its halls, the students, the faculty, the staff who come here to question, to learn, to strive, and to dream and work for a better world, and that is why universities matter.

There are places where we defy the limits of what is possible. There are communities bound not by walls, but by shared purpose and a belief in the future. They remind us that though the world may often seem uncertain or challenging, we have the power to shape what's next.

All that I have absorbed in a lifetime of education and paying attention to my students and my colleagues leads me to conclude one thing: The future is shaped by confident, hopeful, people who understand that progress comes not without risk, but that risk is essential to growth.

This work is not easy. It requires resilience, a spirit of openness and a commitment to accountability. As I reflect on my years here, I know that the most important thing we do is not simply to educate, but to foster a sense of responsibility, to do something, to ask ourselves and our students to be accountable

for the choices we make, to recognize that criticism will come, but that it is a sign that we are engaged in something meaningful.

My father once said to me that if you don't want to be criticized, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing. As I embark on my final year as Dean, I carry with me the deep conviction that Harvard, like all great universities, will continue to be a place where hope flourishes, where possibilities are endless and where the next generation will rise to meet the challenges of our time.

We should never lose this conviction that anything is possible because in the final analysis it is, all this place has. May we all, in our own ways, continue to build, to question and to imagine a better future for ourselves, for this institution, and for the world. Semper Veritas.

Rohan Press:

I invite you please to rise for our prayers.

Oh, thou who maketh the stars and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, we render thee the tribute of our praise for this new day, for the everlasting hopes that rise within the human heart and for the words we share between us, which bring life and immortality to light. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Rohan Press:

And now let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying Our Father, who are to heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it's in heaven. Give us, this day, our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those 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 forever and ever. Amen.

Please join in the singing of our concluding hymn, hymn number 346, From Thee All Skill and Science Flow.

Congregation:

(singing)

Rohan Press:

The Lord give us the grace to approach all our transitions in life with sensitivity and poise, and to find continuity of selfhood in all these phases that we traverse as we move from one part of our life to another. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.