

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to our service of morning prayers here in Appleton Chapel. We are continuing today with our series of senior talks, and our speaker is Rasmee Ky, a senior in Lowell House. Welcome. Please rise in body or in spirit for our responsive Psalm reading, which is number 130 in your black psalter, page 65. Please make the responses in bold. "Out of the depths have I called to you. O God, hear my voice. Let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication."

Congregation:

"If you were to note what is done amiss, O God, who could stand?"

Elizabeth Propst:

"For there is forgiveness with you, therefore, you shall be feared."

Congregation:

"I wait for you, O God. My soul waits for you. In your word is my hope."

Elizabeth Propst:

"My soul waits for you, more than centuries for the morning, more than centuries for the morning."

Congregation:

"O Israel, wait for God, for with God there is mercy."

Elizabeth Propst:

"With God there is plenteous redemption. God shall redeem Israel from all their sins."

Choir:

(singing)

Rasmee Ky:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning, Rasmee.

Rasmee Ky:

"To His Excellency [inaudible 00:06:54] Sun, Ambassador of Cambodia, with warm regards, Richard Nixon." This was the note written at the bottom of a photograph my family waited generations to see.

My journey to get there started in my childhood. I used to fantasize that many years before I was born, my dad led a secret life as a pirate because whenever he laughed, I noticed the glinting of metal teeth in the back of his mouth. This kicked off my theorizing. Why had my dad never gone to college? I bet he traded it for a life of adventure. What happens to his mysterious older sister who lacked even a grave site? Well, she must have died at sea. I had to embark on my own quest for the truth, following pieces of a map I fit together in the hopes it might lead me to long buried treasure.

One piece starts here. My dad tells me a story from his childhood. He's walking by his brother who's crouched oddly over the ground. He's digging up dirt and scooping handfuls into his mouth. My dad then excitedly asks, "Does that help? Does it taste good?", before sitting down next to his brother. He describes scraping and scraping until his skin was raw, because the agony of a stomach that had been empty for days distracted him from hands that had begun to bleed. Yet my dad ended that story laughing at the absurdity of eating dirt with enough desperation to make it look the most delicious food in the world. I didn't share my father's humor. I had no right to. I couldn't turn back time or bring back who he lost. Because I couldn't do anything, I had to at least feel the right things. I lost days of sleep replaying his stories in my head until I was full of fury and grief.

Another piece of the family mythos came from my grandmother. We have a nemesis. Before the Khmer Rouge took power, my grandmother realized the country was on the path to war. So she wrote to her husband's brother, who was an ambassador to Canada. She pleaded with him to send her family visas so they could escape. She never got an answer, which left her children trapped in a country trying to murder them. So she swore off this branch of the family forever. Upon hearing this story, I was completely on board with her. Then out of the blue last summer, I received a call from my brother Brendan. To my shock, our family had planned a road trip to Montreal, a journey that would bring us face to face with the enemy. Through the intergenerational powers of my grandmother's knowledge, my dad's translation, and my brother's Facebook navigation, we've been able to reconnect with my formerly disavowed grand uncle and been invited to his home. I asked Brendan, "I thought the Canadians were evil. How could our grandmother forgive them?"

Although my grandmother will hold a grudge for decades, all those years left her too weak to walk, let alone fly, across the world. But she was sure that my grand uncle still had photos from his time in Cambodia. This would be the closest she ever got to returning home. So over a long weekend, my mom, my dad, my brother, my aunt, my two cousins, and I crammed ourselves into a minivan and ventured north. For six hours, I sat cross-armed in the back of the car, preparing myself for a confrontation 50 years in the making. In Montreal, we were welcomed by an old man and his two daughters. They were ecstatic to meet us. My grand uncle brought us to his apartment, which was arranged like a museum. He flourished photos of himself sitting in the UN and meeting the king of Cambodia. He dug up old wedding photos, including one with my grandmother as a young woman.

These images were the only surviving remnants of my family, but I couldn't focus on the photos. The whole time, I quietly obsessed to myself, "Was anyone going to confront him about the letter? Did he never receive it? Did he have some kind of excuse?" No one brought it up. Towards the end of the day, my grand uncle was so overjoyed to be reunited with his family that he turned on Khmer music and started dancing. I'd been sitting with my dad, but he nudged me to join him, so I did, and in that moment, my grand uncle looked happy. My dad looked happy. I forgot about the letter, and I was happy too. I thought I finally got the family's secret when I discovered the tragic memories my dad shielded me from as a child. But he'd been showing me the truth all along. The only reason I noticed his metal teeth in the first place is because my dad laughs so often and so openly.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please join me in a few moments of silent prayer.

All of the words spoken and unspoken this morning, O God, we lived up to you. Please rise in body or in spirit for the Lord's prayer.

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 trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Please join in our closing hymn for the Splendor of Creation, which is number 351 in your hymnal.

Congregation:

For the splendor of creation that draws us to inquire.

For the mysteries of knowledge to which our hearts aspire.

For the deep and subtle beauties which delight the eye and ear.

For the discipline of logic, the struggle to be clear.

For the unexplained remainder, the puzzling and the odd.

For the joy and pain of learning, we give you thanks, O God.

For the scholars past and present whose bounty we digest.

For the teachers who inspire us to summon forth our best.

For our rivals and companions, sometimes foolish, sometimes wise.

For the human web upholding this noble enterprise.

For the common life that binds us through days that soar or plod.

For this place and for these people, we give you thanks, O God.

Elizabeth Propst:

For any seniors in the room, you'll also see that hymn at commencement in a couple of weeks.

Remember, as you go up forth into this day that Christ has no hands in this world but yours, no voice but yours. To make our hands and our voices do the work of justice and of love, stand always. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.