

Speaker 1:

Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning.

Speaker 1:

Welcome to the Appleton Chapel here in our memorial church for our daily service of morning prayers. Our speaker this morning is Sarah Whiting, Dean, and Josep Lluís Sert, Professor of architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. I invite you please to rise and join in the singing of our Responsorial Psalm, which is Psalm number 51 in your black Psalter.

Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness according to the multitude of Thy mercies do away mine offenses.

Audience:

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin.

Speaker 1:

For I acknowledge my faults and my sin is ever before me.

Audience:

Against thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified in thy saying and clear when thou art judged.

Speaker 1:

Thou shalt purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Thou shalt wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Audience:

Thou shalt make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

Speaker 1:

Turn thy face from my sins and put out all my misdeeds.

Audience:

Make me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within me.

Speaker 1:

Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

Audience:

O give me the comfort of thy help again and establish me with thy free Spirit.

Speaker 1:

You may be seated.

Speaker 3:

Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning.

Speaker 3:

So what fuels me in my position across the school as well as my own research, my architectural practice, my writing is my deep interest in how it is that the gazillion of people in this world actually work together, live together, forge a future world together. How is it that we live, work and deal with one another socially, spatially, philosophically, politically, economically, or simply culturally? I'm especially curious about how we live together in the complexity that is our contemporary urban environments which are ever more diverse. So I grew up with Free to Be... You and Me, Coke's Perfect Harmony and other slogans and songs of perfect unity. But I'm not naive enough to assume perfect harmony among people or that design might solve this challenge. But how might our public world foster public sympathies, public exchanges, or to put it in the most simple terms, a shared humanity?

I found inspiration in a short text by a German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk's, Atmospheric Politics, which was published in 2005 after being delivered in a conference in 2004. He starts by describing the challenge that 19th century Victorian explorers had in bringing back to England some of their discoveries, particularly the exotic and extraordinary tropical plants that they found. To quote him, he said "The Imperial Englishmen had of course noticed that some of the most beautiful plants had the irritating habit of only wanting to flourish under non-British skies and some creative thinking was necessary if one wished to welcome these guests to the British Isles." This desire led to the invention of the Palm House at Kew Gardens, the first glass house built at a large scale, which was designed and constructed in 1844 by Richard Turner and Decimus Burton using techniques from ship building. So it looks like a big ship hull upside down, built out of glass and steel.

It recreated a tropical rainforest, thereby providing a home for these plants. Sloterdijk describes the repercussions of this architectural feat when he elaborates that it bears, considering that it was the exercise of granting plants hospitality that first created the conditions under which it became possible to formulate a concept of environment. While I could speak at length about the problems that have ensued from our construction of artificial environments, think of how air conditioning has led to urban sprawl in hot climates. I want to focus instead on Sloterdijk's deliberate phrasing when he says that the Palm House granted plants hospitality. Turning back to my interest and how we might grant people a similar hospitality, what might be the human equivalent of the Palm House at Kew Gardens? For Sloterdijk continues, "Cities are as artificial a construct as a glass house." He saw the Polis, the Greek city state, as an answer to the challenge posed by the improbability of bringing numerous strangers together to coexist among shared walls.

In so doing, Sloterdijk focuses on what he calls a proto-architectonic ability to construct waiting rooms that can grant people hospitality. The Polis, he writes, made it possible for strangers and persons who are not related to one another to come together in one place and naturalize in a shared climate, a public environment. The Greek city was in short, a greenhouse for people who agreed to be uprooted from the modus vivendi of living in separation, and instead be planted in the disarming modus vivendi of living

together. "The moral enigma of the city", Sloterdijk continues, "is that it rests on the creation of people who turn away from a certain natural phobia of neighbors, and instead, champion a highly artificial xenophilia." Really nice term. Our public spaces writ large are our shared streets, squares, sidewalks, lobbies, hallways, auditoria, this chapel, and certainly the university. These are places where strangers come together and naturalize in a shared climate.

For our publicness to succeed, for each of us to thrive like those palms in Kew Gardens, we need to tend to these shared waiting rooms as places that provide the space and the time for all of us to acclimate. Success depends on patience. Sloterdijk concludes that the practice of the Polis includes the ability to listen, the ability to wait, and the ability to let others wait. The Polis's ability to serve as a greenhouse falls apart when one comports oneself in the city, as if within one's four walls, confusing public and private space, acting on the shared spaces of the Polis as one does in one's own home. And so I leave you with the hope that you will leave this shared space to consider the shared spaces that you occupy throughout your days, offering hospitality to others, doing your part to construct our shared environment in which xenophilia and therefore our shared public might thrive, grow, and foster a better environment for all of us. Thank you.

Speaker 1:

The night has passed and the day lies open before us. Let us rise to pray with one heart and mind.

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day. So may the light of your presence, oh God, show us how to be more attentive to the purity of our own hearts, which forever bear your impress. And now let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying, our Father...

Audience:

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.

Speaker 1:

Please join in the singing of our concluding hymn number 187, The Spacious Firmament on High.

MUSIC:

The spacious firmament on high.

With all the blue ethereal sky.

And spangled heavens, a shining frame.

Their great Original proclaim.

The unwearied sun from day to day.

Does his Creator's power display.

And publishes to every land.

The work of an almighty hand.

Soon as the evening shades prevail.

The moon takes up the wondrous tale.

And nightly to the listening earth.
Repeats the story of her birth.
Whilst all the stars that round her burn.
And all the planets in their turn.
Confirm the tidings, as they roll.
And spread the truth from pole to pole.
What though in solemn silence all.
Move round the dark terrestrial ball.
What though nor real voice nor sound.
Amid their radiant orbs be found.
In reason's ear they all rejoice.
And utter forth a glorious voice.
For ever singing as they shine.
'The hand that made us is divine.'

Speaker 1:

Lord, it is very easy to confuse public and private space, especially in urban environments. So please grant us the grace to open our arms to the public as and when we traverse the public spaces that we are always moving through. Next time we ride the T, let's make eye contact with the person next to us and say hello, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Audience:

Amen.