

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning is our own Steph Grisano, a third year MDiv at Harvard Divinity School and seminarian here in the Memorial Church. Please rise in body or in spirit for our responsive Psalm reading, which is number 78 in your black psalter.

"Give ear oh my people to my teaching. Turn your ear to what I say."

Audience:

"I will astound the King. Pull forth the blessings of the past."

Elizabeth Propst:

"Things we have heard and known that our fathers have told us."

Audience:

"We will not withhold them from their children telling the coming generation the praises of the Lord and the well-being of the forefathers."

Elizabeth Propst:

"He established a decree in Jacob, ordained a teaching in Israel, charging our fathers to make them known to their children."

Audience:

"That the future generation might know--children yet to be born--and in their turns tell their children."

Elizabeth Propst:

"That they might put their confidence in God and not forget God's great deeds, but observe his commandments."

Audience:

"And not be like thier fathers, a wayward and defiant generation, a generation whose heart was inconstant, whose spirit was not true to God.

(Singing)

Steph Grisano:

Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning.

Steph Grisano:

This is the poem Just a Minute Said a Voice by Mary Oliver. "Just a minute said a voice in the weeds. So I stood still in the day's exquisite early morning light, and so I didn't crush with my great feet any small or unusual thing just happening to pass by where I was passing by on my way to the blueberry fields and maybe it was the toad and maybe it was the June beetle and maybe it was the pink and tender worm who does his work without limbs or eyes and does it well. Or maybe it was the walking stick, still frail and walking humbly by looking for a tree. Or maybe like Blake's wondrous meeting, it was the elves carrying one of their own on a rose-petaled coffin away, away into the deep grasses. After a while, the quaintest voice said thank you, and then there was silence. But the rest I would keep you wondering."

Two summers ago in June, I went on a retreat at the Berry Center for Buddhist Studies. Like most retreats, its setting and schedule were transportive. The grounds were secluded with verdant fields and dense forests surrounding an airy austere meditation hall. We were up at 7:00 A.M. for our first meditation and in our rooms by 9:00 PM to go to sleep. One of the most transportive activities of the retreat though was a walking meditation. The retreatants traversed the quarter-mile stretch from the parking lot to the main road, bringing complete awareness to the undulations of our walking feet. We walked this slowly.

Our heels were not meant to leave the ground until each toe had landed in front of us. As we began, I felt a slight panic rise inside me. How long would it take to get to the end of this road? Moving at this pace was not only boring, it was surprisingly uncomfortable. I wanted to jump out of my skin. I tried to steady my feet, steady my mind rather, on my feet's contact with the earth. But I continued to fight the pace of the walking meditation as my mind sped far ahead of my body.

It was astonishing to me how difficult it was to move slowly. I went to bed feeling as though I had failed. No one told me that you cannot fail or succeed at meditation. Non-attachment is the point, but in the morning, something had shifted. My body had recalibrated a normal pace, whatever that is. Felt too fast, too fast to admire the knotted bark on the trees, too fast to appreciate the particular way that the light filtered through the window in the afternoon. Too fast to feel the comfort of the sun warming my face. It was a delight to move in this measured way, savoring the sights and sensations that had previously eluded my awareness. I felt embodied instead of like a mind attached to a body.

As I integrated my experience of the retreat, I reflected on the quickness, the busyness that characterizes my life. Each day is scheduled hour by hour, attempting to stack meetings and classes so as to block unscheduled time from studying and homework, underestimating how long a task will take or overestimating my energy derails these finely tuned plans leading to overwhelm and a renewal of the baseless hope that with just a little more time or a little more effort, I will finally feel on top of all that I have to do. This is the pace of life that made me chase at the walking meditation. This is the pace of life that made moving more slowly such a revelation.

The pace of my life is just a microcosm of a culture that prizes productivity, efficiency, and optimization that treats time not as a medium through which life proceeds, but as a resource external to us that can be spent, saved, wasted, and maximized. Within this frame, it seems like we are constantly negotiating the consequences of moving too slowly, but we rarely discuss the consequences of moving too quickly. Yes, some things are truly urgent and require swift and clamorous action, but the remainder of our expeditiousness may just be a way to avoid as Oliver Berkman writes, that this life with all of its flaws and inescapable vulnerabilities, its extreme brevity and our limited influence over how it unfolds, is the only one we will get a shot at.

And so I wonder then if in this season of Lent, when Christians are called to face finitude, if slowing down may be a spiritual practice. Christian scripture has a name for this kind of slowing down, kairos time. Kairos time is what Richard Rohr, the Franciscan priest has called deep time. As opposed to Kronos or chronological time, which measures duration, Kairos measures density and intimacy of experience. On the retreat, I was in Kairos time, and so I wonder if Lent is really about time and temporality. The 40 days that Jesus was in the wilderness, the three days it took Jesus to rise again, the supposed eternity that this gained for us. If we face our finitude and stop trying to control Kronos time, we may enter Kairos time, where paradoxically, we may gain a glimpse of the eternity foretold to us. As Mary Oliver says, just for a minute.

Elizabeth Propst:

Holy one, we are very, very busy. We rush from place to place from time to time, shedding seconds like there's no tomorrow. Our thoughts are frantic, chaotic, and yet sometimes we arrive home at the end of a long day and catch ourselves and wonder if we have in fact had a conscious thought at all.

And yet, you call out to us from quiet moments, from boredom, from the weeds, from the empty stretches of time that invite us to notice things that go overlooked. Little miracles built into your creation, built into our lives. Help us to live differently into this time, to find you in these quiet mundane places, and to find the sacredness of what is quiet and mundane and overlookable in ourselves. Amen.

Audience:

Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

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 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 to temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. Please join in our closing hymn, number 47 in your crimson hymnal.

(Singing)

Christ has no hands in this world but yours, no voice but yours. So may our hands and our voices do the work of justice and of love today and always. Amen.

Audience:

Amen.

(Singing)