

Harriet Lindeman:

- Good morning.

Congregation:

- Good morning.

Harriet Lindeman:

- And welcome to Morning Prayers, here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Sue Fisher Wentworth, a Morning Prayers community member, and a Harvard Divinity School alumni. Welcome. Please rise in body, or in spirit, for a responsive reading of Psalm 116, found in your back altar. I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.

Congregation:

- Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore I call upon Him as long as I live.

Harriet Lindeman:

- The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold of me. I found trouble and sorrow.

- Then called I upon the name of the Lord; Oh Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.

Harriet Lindeman:

- Gracious is the Lord, and righteous. Yea, our God is merciful.

- The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me.

Harriet Lindeman:

- I said in my haste, all men are liars.

- What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?

Harriet Lindeman:

- I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.

- I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people.

Harriet Lindeman:

- I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord.

- I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people.

Choir:

(Singing)

Sue Fisher Wentworth:

- Our opening reading is from the English poet, Minnie Louise Haskins. "And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied: "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way". You may be aware of these lines, which King George VI read in his Christmas message to the British people in 1939. Hitler had invaded Poland just three months before, drawing Britain into war. All of Europe stood on the brink. Haskins' words became famous overnight, lighting a flame within, kindling quiet courage and resolve in the British people. In testament to their significance, many years later the Queen Mother had them inscribed over the chapel where the King was buried. And many years later after that, they were read at her service. Thinking back to 1939, we can imagine the shadow falling across Europe. The palpable menace in England's sense of exposure and vulnerability. We know the outcome of that war, they did not. We know something about this feeling of being on the brink of not knowing what is ahead. Personally, nationally, internationally, globally. From what unexpected places will resolve encourage, and hope against hope emerge? I appreciate how these lines from Haskins forthrightly acknowledge how much we want a light, whether the way forward is simply unclear, or darkness is actively gathering, or has fallen upon us. We desperately want to see where we are going, and to have some sense of control over what's happening. We want to push the darkness back, hold it at bay. We often even feel responsible for making that happen. She says to the man, "Give me a light." But the man at the Gate of the Year does not comply. He directs her in an entirely different mode. And we have to ask better than light? Safer than a known way? What kind of knowledge is this, not known? His instructions suggest it is given through, in, and by being in relation with another, at once hidden and at hand. "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God". I appreciate the sequence here. The first step isn't putting your hand into the hand of God. The first step is to go out into the darkness. That seems important to me. Saint John of the Cross, who knew something about darkness, said something similar. "To know your road, you must close your eyes and walk in the dark". We are invited not to shrink from the darkness, not to avoid, ignore, deny, or rage against it. But to recognize it as darkness, and go out into it. Things are dark. We don't have a light. So go out into it, and then put your hand into the hand of this unseen presence. This radically trustworthy other has already gone before us into the darkness, and waits for us exactly there. The Psalmist says, "If I say surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night", darkness is not dark to you, oh Lord. The night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light to you are both a light. On the night before his enemies were going to spring their deadly trap, Jesus went into the darkness of a nearby garden, and then into the deeper darkness of his Father's silence. He gave himself into his Father's hands, having no idea what that would mean. We do, but he did not. And it all looked catastrophic. And was. And yet, I was talking with my younger sons about these lines from Haskins, and he said, "There's something there about creativity", and I think that's right. There's something here about the possibility of the impossibly new. It points to what Sharon Chrisner, our speaker a week ago, so beautifully called the genius ability to rig up something good out of terrible materials. I wonder what shape might going out into the darkness and putting your hand into the hand of God take for you, and for me, and for our communities now. For our closing prayer, I will repeat the final stanza that our lovely choir just sang for us. Please join me in prayer. Even with darkness sealing us in, We

breathe Your name. And through all the days that follow so fast, We trust in You. Endless Your grace, oh endless Your grace. Beyond all mortal dream, both now and forever, and unto ages and ages. Amen.

- Amen.

Harriet Lindeman:

- Please rise in body or in spirit. And now let us pray as Jesus taught saying, "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 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. Let us sing the hymn, "Let Us With a Gladsome Mind", number eight. ♪ Let us, with a gladsome mind ♪ ♪ Praise the Lord, for He is kind ♪ ♪ For His mercies shall endure ♪ ♪ Ever faithful, ever sure ♪ ♪ He with all-commanding might ♪ ♪ Filled the new-made world with light ♪ ♪ For His mercies shall endure ♪ ♪ Ever faithful, ever sure ♪ ♪ Let us blaze His name abroad ♪ ♪ For of Gods He is the God ♪ ♪ For his mercies shall endure ♪ ♪ Ever faithful, ever sure ♪ ♪ He doth shine the moon at night ♪ ♪ With her spangling sisters bright ♪ ♪ For His mercies shall endure ♪ ♪ Ever faithful, ever sure ♪ ♪ All things living He doth feed ♪ ♪ His full hand supplies their need ♪ ♪ For His mercies shall endure ♪ ♪ Ever faithful, ever sure ♪ And now as we leave this place, the peace of God be in your heart, the love of God be in your hands, the joy of God be in your soul. Go in peace, Amen.

- Amen.