

Amy Sexauer:

Good morning.

Audience:

Good Morning.

Amy Sexauer:

Welcome to the Appleton Chapel here in our Memorial Church for our daily service of Morning Prayers. Our speaker this morning is Aric Fleming, Jr., class of 2019, and Assistant Director for the Harvard Business School Office of Doctoral Programs. I invite you today to rise and sing today's Psalter, number 145 in the black books found in your pews.

I will exalt you, O Holy God, and bless your name forever and ever.

Audience:

I will exalt you, O Holy God, and bless your name forever and ever.

Amy Sexauer:

I will exalt you, O Holy God, and bless your name forever and ever.

Audience:

One generation shall praise your works, another shall declare your power.

Amy Sexauer:

I will ponder the glorious splendor of your majesty and all your marvelous works.

Audience:

You uphold all those to all. You lift up those who are bowed down.

Amy Sexauer:

The eyes of all wait upon you, O God, and you give them their food in due season.

Audience:

You open wide your hand and satisfy the needs of every living creature.

Amy Sexauer:

You are righteous in all your ways and loving in all your works.

Audience:

You are near to those who call upon you, to all who call upon you faithfully.

Amy Sexauer:

Amen.

Aric Fleming, Jr.:

Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning.

Aric Fleming, Jr.:

It's been a long time. Happy to be back with my Memorial Church family. This morning, I have the pleasure of reflecting on a thought that I will title Down from Power, Down from Power, inspired by Philippians 2:6-11, I'll say it that way. And I'll read it in this version, The Message translation, which is originally constructed by Eugene Peterson.

"Think of yourselves in this way that Christ Jesus thought of Himself. He had equal status with God, but didn't think so much of Himself that He had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, He set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human. Having become human, He stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, He lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death, and the worst kind of death at that, a crucifixion."

"Because of that obedience, God lifted Him high and honored Him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth, even those long dead and gone buried, will bow and worship before this Jesus Christ and call out and praise that He is the Master of all to the glorious honor of God the Father."

In conversation with several friends of mine, the question was then asked, "What does it mean to come down from power?" You're on a limb. It's fragile. And you're afraid it's going to break, so you panic. You wonder, "What if this limb breaks? What will I do?" Somehow you realize that the mission, you being on such a limb, is much bigger than just you, and you remain committed to the cause. Regardless of whether the limb breaks, you're committed. If they see you fall from the tree, you're committed. If you suffer embarrassment, you're committed. If it costs you everything, you're still committed. What you possess is no match for the sacrifice that you'll make to do what is right. Come hell or high water, you're committed to a cause bigger than yourself. Serving more than just yourself, helping more than just yourself, that is what it means to come down from power.

To come down from power means that you forsake the desire to hold your possessions above the sacred dignity of all human beings. It means that you uproot language that discriminates against the underrepresented, and that you take accountability for the truth you cannot face about yourself. It means that you do not hold others responsible for enabling because you do not understand the internal truth about the violence that works within systems that you perpetuate every day.

It means that you care for the oppressed and the marginalized more than the wealth of the wicked and pleasures of the earth. It literally means that you take off the shoes on your feet and trade them for sandals that expose the feet that you have the luxury of hiding every day. Why don't you drink from the cup of vulnerability and tell me how it tastes? Bitter, huh? Not sweet at all.

See, Jesus is not obliged to take and to do what He does in this Christian text just for the sake of it. He heals the sick, raises the dead, combats institutional evils, and seeks to eradicate violence in flawed and vitriolic power structures, but to go out on a limb for those who He has no connection with. To go out on a limb for those who you love, means that even if the entire world stands against you, you still commit to the company of equity and justice ethics.

But I must argue here with my fellow NYTS alum, Eugene Peterson, whose reading of the NRSV somehow stands in theological commitment to a Jesus ethic that encourages practices and commitments to justice for something in return: eternal transactions I like to call them.

But the gospel at its best is not transactional. It's free. And so should our commitment to justice be free. And so too should our commitment to the Jesus ethic be free. And so too should our commitment to liberation be free. But somehow, my Christianity is tied up in service to get something in return; when it's not about what I can get in return, but what I can do for somebody just because, just because it's the right thing to do. That is what it means to come down from power.

Let us pray.

Aric Fleming and audience:

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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Amy Sexauer:

Friends, now if you would please stand and join in our concluding hymn, number 85. We sing the song For All the Unsung Saints.

Friends, may we leave this place and reject the temptations of power, to turn towards God, towards love, today and every day. Amen.

Audience:

Amen.