

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning is Travis Johnson, a senior at Harvard College and the newly minted Truman scholar. We're blessed by his presence with us this morning. Please rise in body or spirit for our responsive Psalm reading, which is number 130 in your black Psalter. "Out of the depths have I called to you. 'Oh God, hear my voice. Let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.'"

Congregation:

[inaudible 00:04:45].

Elizabeth Propst:

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

Congregation:

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

Elizabeth Propst:

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

Congregation:

Oh Israel, [inaudible 00:05:12]. For with God there is mercy.

Elizabeth Propst:

With God there is plenty of redemption. God shall redeem Israel from all their sins. (Singing).

Travis Johnson:

Good morning, everyone.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Travis Johnson:

It's great to be here today, even despite the rain and chilly temperatures outside. I'd like to begin by reading a passage from the Bible that inspires my message today. That verse is Esther 4:14. The King James version translation reads, "For if thou altogether hold thy peace at this time then shall their enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed. And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Before I

go any further, I do find it important to mention that I personally grew up in a Baptist church, so, of course, it's customary for me to title every speech or message that I deliver. As such, my title today is derived from the last six words of the verse that I just read, "For such a time as this." And to add my own spin, twist, or flavor to it, I'd like to title my message this morning, Courage For Such A Time As This.

I want to begin this morning by sharing a story with you all, a story that I haven't told many people, but one that was pretty integral to my personal development and one that offers hope for the challenges we confront and face today. My first time experiencing severe anxiety or nervousness in college came during the summer of 2022. As some of you, my friends, may know, that summer I moved to Dallas, Texas for the first time to accept an internship offer. So early one morning in early June, late May, my brother, sister, and I loaded my car and began the nearly 15 hour road trip to Dallas. I gave my parents a hug goodbye and on the outside I projected confidence. On the inside, however, I was pretty terrified and scared.

This was the beginning of a new journey for me. And some of you may be wondering and thinking, wasn't moving to college a similar journey? But while moving to college was also a journey that took me far, that journey was one that came with pre-built friendships and opportunities to connect with other people, such as pre-orientation programs or extracurricular activities. Dallas was different. For the first time in my life, I'd be living halfway across the country and to make matters worse, I could probably count all of the people I knew who lived in Dallas on one hand. But I didn't allow my fears to overcome me, and instead I quickly grew to love Dallas. I met many friends and in a full circle moment I began attending a church where I was able to strengthen my understanding of and relationship with God.

While I was initially nervous to move to Dallas, those six words I said a few moments ago for such a time as this guided my journey. It required and allowed me to step outside of my comfort zone and step into my faith. I had the courage to meet new people, find a new church family, and for that I remain eternally grateful. The story of me moving to Dallas isn't an opportunity for me to just discuss my fears or concerns or anxiety with you all. But it serves a broader point, especially given the challenges we as a university, as a community, and as a world face today. To my fellow seniors in the audience, at some point in our career, I know that we've all asked ourselves the question, why us? It seems as if our college journeys have been sandwiched by crises. We started this journey off in the middle of a life altering pandemic and we are ending it amidst difficult and dark times across the globe.

Here at Harvard, as a community, we find every action scrutinized by outside media or agitators. Some may view this as a challenge, but I view it as an opportunity to demonstrate the courage that God has given all of us, and I've learned in my life that courage doesn't correlate with comfort. Indeed, this is something I learned when I moved to Dallas and has been reinforced in my head time after time again. But courage is what allows us to tackle challenges with confidence and clarity. Just like I was when I moved to Texas, it's okay for us to be nervous and have worries when these challenges do confront us in life. The important part is being able to move forward and always seek opportunities to be courageous. As I close my message today, on the last day of my last first week here at Harvard College, I invite all of you to remember that we were all called to be in this moment for such a time as this.

After a difficult upbringing, including the loss of both of her parents, God placed Esther in her village during a difficult time to save an entire group of people, her people. And it is with that same spirit that God has placed all of us here today and he has given us the courage to do what is right. So as we leave here today, I encourage you to engage in an exercise that I often participate in and I enjoy doing. Rather than questioning the circumstances we find ourselves in, I encourage you to reframe your thought process and understand that God's plan calls for all of us to be right here, right now for such a time as this. We're facing difficult times, these times call for extraordinary courage, and it is my personal desire that we never forget the God-given courage that resides in all of us, the courage to fight for others,

including those who can't fight for themselves, the courage to forgive and to love, but most importantly, the courage to always stand up for what we believe in, even during life's most difficult moments.

Please join me in a prayer. Let's pray. Dear heavenly God. I want to begin by thanking you for this day, Lord God. I thank you for the presence of friends, loved ones, and colleagues, Lord. I ask you to guide our hearts and our actions this upcoming year, Father. Lord, I ask you to remind all of us that you are a faithful God. You're the God of beginnings and end. You're the God of alpha and omega. Lord, I ask you to remember to continue to guide us in life's difficult moments and remind us of your word in Esther where you taught us that we were all created here for such a time as this. Lord, I thank you for the things you've done for all of us, I thank you for keeping us, and I ask you to allow this year to be a successful one, but most importantly, allow us to always continue to uplift and glorify your name. In your heaven name, we pray. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Travis Johnson:

Thank you.

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 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 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 81 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.

Congregation:

Amen.