

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to morning prayers here in the Appleton Chapel. Our speaker for this morning is Victor Seidel, an innovation fellow at the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. Welcome, Victor. Please rise, in body, or in spirit for a responsive Psalm reading, which is number one in your black salter. "Blessed is the man that walketh not on the council of the ungodly nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful."

Congregation:

"But he delights in the law of the Lord and in this law shall we meditate day and night."

Elizabeth Propst:

"And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season. His leaf also shall not wither and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

Congregation:

"The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff that the wind driveth away."

Elizabeth Propst:

"Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous."

Congregation:

"For the Lord knows the way of the righteous but the way of the ungodly shall perish." (singing)

Victor Seidel:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Victor Seidel:

In the past fortnite, the first lunar landing by an American spacecraft in over 50 years was completed with somewhat mixed results. Apparently, the unmanned spacecraft toppled over while landing and in its resting position will be unable to conduct all the experiments it was tasked to do. Even so many are calling the landing a success. What is success and what is failure? Before getting to a longer passage I'll start with a short quote by the inventor, design theorist and geodesic dome architect, R. Buckminster Fuller, who matriculated at Harvard in 1913. He spent much of his life rethinking society's approach to the built environment, and he was interested in the design and innovation process. He saw failure as

integral to any advance noting that you can never learn less, you can only learn more. The reason I know so much is because I've made so many mistakes.

It should be noted that while he eventually went on to be awarded several honorary doctorates and fellowship in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he never completed his Harvard degree. Of course, recognition of the wisdom gained through repeated trials and failures goes back to Aristotle, as well as countless other writers of different philosophies and faiths from across the ages. And even though intellectually we know that progress, innovation and new designs are all informed by failures along the way, it can be very hard to change our perspective to one that focuses on what we often want to sweep under the rug. Too often we are lured by case studies of successful firms, products or individuals for templates of how to do this and that when perhaps we should be doing the opposite.

Henry Petroski, a widely read contemporary historian of technology and innovation, discusses the difference between success based and failure based innovation, noting that paradoxically, the latter is more likely to succeed. He goes on with an example. John Roebling, master of the Suspension Bridge form looked not to successful examples of the state of the art, but to historical failures for his education and guidance. From these, he learned what forces and motions were the enemies of bridges, and he designed his own to resist those forces and suppress those motions. Such failure based thinking ultimately gave us the Brooklyn Bridge with its signature diagonal cables, which Roebling meant to steady the structure against the wind that he knew could be its undoing.

So, it is not merely to acknowledge failure as part of innovation that is important, it's not merely to learn from those failures, but it can also at times be to seek out the problems and failures around us as platforms for learning to study ourselves against the winds that may be our own undoing. When we persevere and learn from our own failures and from the flaws we see around us, we have the opportunity to create beautiful things where there are monumental bridge connecting communities, a place of worship and reflection as we have here today or new social innovation that addresses wrongs we perceive in society. Circling back to R. Buckminster Fuller, in his writing he recounts how he first struggled to find his footing professionally and questioned how he could contribute to society. In the end, he found ways to expand the realm of ideas about how we might guide our spaceship earth to flourish.

There's a quote attributed to Fuller that provides reflection of how we might view our own role as we navigate personal successes and failures. Never forget that you are one of a kind. Never forget that if there weren't any need for you and all your uniqueness to be on this earth, you wouldn't be here in the first place and never forget, no matter how overwhelming life's challenges and problems seem to be, that one person can make a difference in the world. In fact, it is always because of one person that all the changes that matter in the world come about. So be that one person. This week there was a lunar lander resting on the moon's surface. It was not there two weeks ago. It was designed by a community of persons who set out to do something innovative. Perhaps as we look up at the moon and think about that spacecraft lying there, we can reflect on our own notions of success and failure.

Elizabeth Propst:

Will you join me in prayer? Holy one, we see a world around us marked by failure, by our failures of compassion, of attention, failure to take responsibility. It is difficult for us to see these failures as anything but condemnation, difficult to see how they might be the ground of our responsibility and our potential, but as we continue to journey through our Lenten season towards the week in our faith that marks the great conjunction of failure and triumph, help us to abide in this ambiguity. Be with us as we continue to live and to learn. Amen.

Congregation:

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 it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespassed 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 285 in your crimson hymnal. (singing)

Just a quick notice, you might have already realized that our hand railings on the stairs out front have been removed for our upcoming choir concerts, so if you anticipate needing to use the railings, I would advise that you take our side entrance this way and just take the ramp back out into the sanctuary. A reminder that 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.