

Wes Conn: Good morning. Welcome to morning prayers. We'll begin today's service with the responsive reading from the Black Appleton Chapel Psalter book, psalm selection number 15, found on page eight. Please stand as you are able.

Wes Conn: Oh, God, who may dwell in your tabernacle? Who may abide upon your holy hill?

Audience: Those who lead blameless lives, and do what is right, who speak truthfully from the heart.

Wes Conn: There is no guile upon their tongues. They do no evil to their friends. They do not heap contempt upon their neighbors.

Audience: In their spite, the wicked is rejected, but they may honor those who fear God.

Wes Conn: They have sworn to do no wrong, and do not take back their word.

Audience: They do not give their money in the holy name, nor take a bribe against the innocent.

Wes Conn: Whoever does these things shall never be overthrown. You may take your seats.

Choir: (singing).

Richard Parker: Good morning. My reading this morning is from Psalm 37, verses one through seven. "Do not fret because of those who are evil, or be envious of those who do wrong. They're like the grass. They will soon wither like green plants. They will soon die away. Instead, trust in the Lord, and do good. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.

Richard Parker: "Do not fret when people succeed in their ways when they carry out their wicked schemes, for those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land."

Richard Parker: Let me start my little talk this morning by reading and not singing. If you knew how I sang, you'd be very appreciative of my choice. The first stanza of a hymn that I, as a boy growing up, always loved. You may know it. It's called I Sing a Song at the Saints of God. This is the first verse. "I sing a song of the saints of God, patient and brave and true, who toiled and fought and lived and died for the Lord they loved and knew. And one was a doctor, and one was a queen, and one was a shepherdess on the green. They were all of them saints of God, and I, me, God helped me to be one, too."

Richard Parker: I'm an Episcopalian, one of that small group of mainline Protestants my Jewish wife knowingly, but affectionately, refers to as God's frozen people, and that is a very Episcopal hymn. It's actually an origin in Anglican hymn, but nevermind. You understand.

Richard Parker: I use it to open my homily to say something important about evangelizing, which all Christians are called to do, and evangelizing for justice, which only some of us apparently feel called to do even today, 2000 years after the death of Jesus Christ. I first learned that hymn in my father's church. My father was an Episcopal minister in the late 1950s, about the same time the sin of racism was once again being put before the white American majority, of which I was then just one tiny member. I was seven years old when Brown versus the Board of Education was decided, and so it was the first halting and violence haunted attempts to desegregate schools in Little Rock, Arkansas that shaped who I would become.

Richard Parker: I was growing up in California, and so when I was 10, the extraordinary televised images of young African American boys and girls, barely older than I was, trying to simply attend school in Arkansas in 1957, a simple act that required calling out the United States army. Stunning.

Richard Parker: Most of us, I now understand, begin to form our own moral imaginations in adolescents. We're taught the rudiments by our parents, but we make those values our own only by sifting through their teaching and what we experience day by day. And television in the 1950s played an enormous role in redefining what daily experience meant.

Richard Parker: My father was a low church, high social gospel Episcopalian. That may be, to some of you, a vague and esoteric jumble of words, so let me restate it through my mother's words. When she once explained to me that my father thought that the Holy Trinity was father, son, and Franklin Roosevelt. We were, in short, social gospel Christians.

Richard Parker: In an era now when 20% of Americans say they have no formal religious identity whatsoever, and 40% of young people say the same, the fact that my social gospel Christianity has been eclipsed in the public square by the hatefulness of what is now known as the Christian right appalls me.

Richard Parker: The test of being a Christian, in the tradition in which I was raised, is neither about political party nor political ideology. And let me be clear, my father's inclusion of FDR in the Trinity was neither a partisan nor an ideological act, but a fundamental, indelible, inescapable religious insistence that Christians like him, like me, and believers like you, whatever your faith, live our faith by word and action into the world.

Richard Parker: I'm descended, despite my birth in California, from a long line of new Englanders. Five years ago, I was in Florence, Italy, where I went to visit the grave of my ancestor, the Reverend Theodore Parker. Theodore Parker was one of the Secret Six, the men who financed John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, hoping to spark an uprising that would ultimately lead to the destruction of slavery and racism. It failed in its immediate aims, and Reverend Parker and his wife had to flee America for fear that they, too, would be hanged like John Brown. And he died in Florence, sadly in some ways, before the first shots were fired at Fort Sumpter. But you can go today still to Florence and visit his grave in the English cemetery on the Eastern side of the city, and admire the gravestone that was paid for and installed by his great and dear friend, Frederick Douglas.

Richard Parker: I didn't know the story for Theodore Parker when I first began singing I Sing a Song of the Saints of God, but let me read you the hymn's last stanza. "They live not only in ages past. There are hundreds of thousands still. The world is bright with the joy his saints who loved to do Jesus's will. You can meet them in schools or in lanes or at sea, in church or in trains or at shops or at tea. But the saints of God are folks just like me, and I mean to be one, too."

Richard Parker: Let us pray. God, on this gray morning in this often gray time for our nation, when we are denied the leaders that we most need, help us hear and absorb and be nourished by these words written by your courageous and faithful son, Reinhold Niebuhr, who lived in and fought against a time still darker than our own.

Richard Parker: Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime. Therefore, we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history. Therefore, we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone. Therefore, we must be saved by love.

Richard Parker: Amen.

Congregation: Amen.

Wes Conn: Please join me in praying together the Lord's Prayer, found on the reverse of your order of worship.

Wes Conn: 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 forever and ever. Amen.

Wes Conn: Please stand as you are able to sing together the hymn, Now Thank We All Our God, number five in your Crimson Harbor Hymnal.

Congregation: (singing)

Wes Conn: Receive now this benediction. May the Lord keep you from evil, and may the Lord keep you in your going out and in your coming in, from this time on and forevermore. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.