

Sally Hammel: Good morning and welcome to morning prayers. Will you please stand as you are able and join me in the responsive reading of the Psalm number 112 in your black Appleton psalter?

Sally Hammel: Oh, praise the Lord. Happy is the man who fears the Lord and finds great joy in his commandments.

Congregation: His descendants shall be the mightiest in the land, a blessed generation of good men..

Sally Hammel: His house shall be full of wealth and riches. Righteousness shall be his forever.

Congregation: He is gracious, compassionate, good. A beacon in the darkness for honest men.

Sally Hammel: It is right for a man to be gracious in his lending, to order his affairs with judgment.

Congregation: Nothing shall ever shake him. His goodness shall be remembered for all time.

Sally Hammel: Bad news shall have no terrors for him because his heart is steadfast.

Congregation: His confidence is strongly based . He will have no fear. And in the end he will gloat over his enemies.

Sally Hammel: He gives freely to the poor. Righteousness shall be his forever. In honor he carries his head high.

Congregation: The wicked man shall see it with rising anger and grind his teeth in despair. The boasts of wicked men shall come to nothing.

Choir: (Singing)

Lara Glass: Good morning. As we have begun exploring our theme of Pilgrimage here at Mem Church, I've been thinking a lot about the homecoming element of a journey. I find the concept of home to be quite elusive. At once concrete, "Where do I live?" Or maybe, "Where did I grow up?" And at the same time, very abstract and ever-changing. "What relationships make up my community? Where and with whom do I feel loved, seen, and accountable to?"

Lara Glass: I take inspiration today, not from a text exactly, but from the opening of the 1994 film adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's Little Women directed by Gillian Armstrong. As the film opens, we see a modest New England home covered in snow, setting us in the mid 19th century in Concord, Massachusetts. The opening score, written by Thomas Newman, which is one of my all-time favorite film scores, dances through the screen and I feel what I can only describe as a feeling of home.

- Lara Glass: I do not remember the first time that I saw this movie, though somehow this film became associated with Christmas in my family. And we watched it together almost every year at some point in the Christmas season. I did also read the book, though I confess that the brilliant way the movie brings life into the world of the four March sisters is what I truly cherish. The vibrant lives of four young women growing up in the mid 19th century in Concord. A time and place far from Albuquerque, New Mexico in the 1990s and early 2000s, somehow always struck a chord in me.
- Lara Glass: The middle of two sisters myself, I think it was particularly impactful to observe the innate differences between the March girls despite their shared kinship and home environment. To accompany them as they learned, clumsily at times, how to love and support one another to grow. Not into sameness, but into the particularity that each bring into the world.
- Lara Glass: We are let into their relationships in both painful and delightful ways. In one of my favorite scenes, we see Jo crying quietly at night in her chair by the fire as her sister Beth wakes. They had learned earlier that day that their father had been injured fighting for the Union Army during the Civil War. Jo had just sold her long, beautiful hair so that their mother could purchase a train ticket to tend to their ailing father. Beth puts her arms around Jo and asks, "Are you thinking about father?" To which Jo somewhat shamefully replies, "No, my hair." And they laugh together amidst Jo's sobs, a moment of relief within the painful absurdity of it all.
- Lara Glass: Almost exactly a year ago, my mom came up to New England to visit me. She hadn't been out to see me since my graduation from Harvard Divinity School and she was to be meeting my partner Richard for the first time. My mom has an affinity for house museums, which I have inherited either by nature or by virtue of visiting so many with her growing up. So my mom, Richard, and I went out to Orchard House in Concord where Louisa May Alcott lived for a period of her life and which served as a setting of Little Women.
- Lara Glass: It was a perfect October day in New England. Crisp and sunny, cool and full of a of fall colors. The orange roundness of pumpkins and golden mums framed the front of the house in perfect color contrast with the turquoise front door. It was, for me, a convergence of homecomings. It was both lovely and strange to visit in person a place etched into my mind from annual Little Women screenings. Like meeting a celebrity. In a beautiful contradiction, walking around Orchard House transported my heart to my Albuquerque home, despite being physically situated thousands of miles away in this place I now live, but that I struggle to call home. The presence of my mom who has shaped so much of what home means for me, alongside Richard with whom I have begun to create a new structure of home, was its own convergence. I really realized just how much I have changed and grown since the first time I saw Orchard House at the opening of Little Women as a child. At the same time, I was overwhelmed by a

feeling of homecoming through the concreteness of the house itself. A touch point to real people and fictional stories who have shaped who I am.

- Lara Glass: I share this with you today with this sneaky suspicion that I am not the only person here who struggles with the concept of home and homecoming, with change and with growing up. I hope that, as I was able to access by watching Little Women for the hundredth time this past weekend, you may be able to spend some time today with someone or someplace, whether literary or embodied, that invites you home.
- Sally Hammel: Let us pray. Protect us, oh Lord, in all the changes of this mortal life that we, surely trusting you're never-failing love, may accept the issues of life in. the glad service of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.
- Sally Hammel: Please join me in the Lord's prayer.
- Congregation: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thine 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.
- Sally Hammel: And now please stand as you are able and join us in singing the hymn O Thou Great Friend to All of Us Below. Number 230 in your Crimson Hymnal.
- Congregation: (Singing)
- Sally Hammel: Please join us after the service for MemCafe, which is from 8:45 to 9:45 downstairs every Wednesday. And now may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.
- Congregation: Amen.