

Sally Hammel: Good morning and welcome to Morning Prayers. Will you please stand as you're able and join in the responsive reading of the Psalm 97 in the Black Appleton Salter.

Sally Hammel: "The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice. Let the many coastlines be glad."

Congregation: Clouds and thick darkness are round about him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

Sally Hammel: "Fire goes before him and burns up in his adversaries round about."

Congregation: His lightnings lighten the world; the earth sees and trembles.

Sally Hammel: "The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth."

Congregation: The heavens proclaim his righteousness; and all the peoples behold his glory.

Sally Hammel: "All worshipers of images are put to shame who made their boast in worthless idols. All gods bow down before him."

Congregation: Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of thy judgements, O God.

Sally Hammel: "For thou, O Lord art most high over all the earth that are exalted far above all gods."

Congregation: The Lord loves those who hate evil; he preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

Sally Hammel: "Light dawns for the righteous and joy for the upright in heart."

Congregation: Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name.

Choir: [singing]

Rita Powell: Psalm 119 verse 105 reads "Your word is a lamp, a light on my path." I've been spending time this fall reading the sixth century writer who takes the name Dionysus the Areopagite. He describes a mystical intellectual journey into the place where the mysteries of God's word lie simple in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence. He writes a mid, deepest shadow the word pores light on what is most manifest. The verse from Psalm 119 engages the mystery of God's word, imagined as a lamp pouring forth light on what is most manifest, enticing us to step forward again and again.

Rita Powell: And this light is both the scriptural text and also the cosmic illumination of all things that we call Christ. This word is to guide us on a path into deepest

shadow where as Dionysus writes we will be filled with treasures beyond all beauty. And I asked myself in all these abstractions, do I know any good stories about this kind of thing? Here's one that I remembered. I used to work in the black hills and prairies of South Dakota. I was hired by the Bishop and elders of the Niobrara Council, the Lakota part of the Episcopal Diocese.

Rita Powell: I was with some young people and some others, white and native, and we were looking at all these problems in our world. And this one elder who was president of the Oglala Lakota Nation at that time said she thought that what we needed was to come together for some days of prayer to ask God for a vision in the bad lands on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Now to prepare the way for that gathering, some friends of ours from the Taize community invited us up to Lapland to meet and pray with some indigenous Sami people. So a small group of us went up to Ivalo in the Arctic circle and we spent some days on the shores of the great Lake Inari.

Rita Powell: And there, we met with people and prayed and sang in tiny wooden churches and we shared dinners of caribou meats and wild lingonberries. At night we made a fire out under the stars and in the hush of the big close night sky, we smoked tobacco like an offering. Brother Stephen and Father Two Bowls with their cigars and I with my pipe and we sat with the night. Now near the place where the fire was, was this kind of rickety thin walkway that led from the sauna cottage behind us all the way down into the icy Lake. It was the darkest, coldest water I've ever seen, perfectly still.

Rita Powell: And we learned that it was the custom to go from the sauna directly into that water and the close stars and the skeins of silvery green Northern lights, the clarity of the air and the vastness of the water, made you want to be in it, to be one with it, but it was also cold and dark and treacherous. So the first night, the women got in the sauna and we came out then looked at the walkway in our towels, and we started down, but it was just too cold and dark and scary. And so we ran back into the warm fire instead. The next night there was the same fire, the same hush, the same stars, same sauna.

Rita Powell: But this time when we looked out the long narrow way was not dark. Someone had placed and lit dozens of candles all the way from the door of the sauna to the edge of the icy water. The path still narrow, still treacherous, but now illumined was an unmistakable invitation. And so we did it with wild laughter. We leapt naked submerged into the darkness and shocked and gasping surface from the water more alive than this. This Dionysus spoke of an absolute abandonment of oneself, a surrender to ecstasy that would submerge us in the divine like waters of brilliant darkness.

Rita Powell: The mystery of God's word is like a lamp, a light on the path, and fills our sightless minds with treasures beyond all beauty. Indeed. Now this Psalm text I've chosen was also a song that we signed on these nights in Finnish. And I will sing it for you now as the closing prayer.

Rita Powell: (Singing)

Sally Hammel: Please join reciting the Lord's prayer on the back of your program of worship.

Sally Hammel: 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.

Sally Hammel: Will you please stand as you are able and joy in seeing him for today, which is Jesus The Very Thought of The, number 214 in your red, Crimson Hymnal.

Congregation: [singing]

Sally Hammel: It is Wednesday and every Wednesday we meet after morning prayers in the Student Oasis cafe for some fellowship and coffee, please join us. And now let's go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.