

Lara Glass: Good morning. Welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for a responsive reading from your black Appleton Psalter, Psalm number 157, found on page 80. For wisdom moves more easily than motion itself. She pervades and permeates all things because she is so pure.

Congregation: Like a fine mist she rises from the power of God, a pure effluence from the glory of the Almighty.

Lara Glass: She is the brightness that streams from everlasting light, the flawless mirror of the active power of God and the image of his goodness.

Congregation: She is but one, yet can everything, herself unchanging, she makes all things new; age after age she enters into holy souls and makes them God's friends prophets.

Lara Glass: For nothing is acceptable to God, but the man who makes his home with wisdom.

Congregation: If riches are a prize to be desired in life, what is richer than wisdom, the active cause of all things.

Lara Glass: If prudence shows itself in action, who more than wisdom is the artificer of all that is?

Congregation: If virtue is the object of a man's affections, the fruits of wisdom's labors are the virtues; temperance and prudence, justice and fortitude. These are her teaching, and in the life of all there is nothing more valued than peace.

Lara Glass: You may be seated.

Choir: (singing)

Daniel Smith: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

Daniel Smith: Our text this morning comes from the prophet Isaiah starting at Chapter 40. Classic text for the beginning of the Advent season. "A voice cries out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low. The uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'" Here ends our reading. May it be blessed to our understanding.

Daniel Smith: Every time it snows I covet those many bulldozers that Harvard dispatches to clear its sidewalks and footpaths. I want one, badly, to help me when it comes time to shovel out. But I also want the chance to drive one, and apparently I'm not alone. It turns out there's a new craze in grown-up recreation. I wonder if you've heard of it. Heavy equipment adventures. Check out this online description from one such company called

Extreme Sandbox. "We let clients drive a 26-ton excavator or bulldozer for fun. Young and old, men and women, individuals and corporate groups can live out their childhood dreams by playing in our sandboxes. There is no other place in the world where you can drive a bulldozer, crush a car, and finish off with a ride in our fire truck."

Daniel Smith: Thrill in the chance to drive a Zamboni, and I might just lose my mind in childlike joy at the very prospect. Silly, I know. Problematic, sure. But if we take Isaiah's words to heart, these earth-moving dreams just might be biblical. "Make straight a highway for God. Every mountain shall be made low." Sounds like a job for heavier equipment than even Harvard has. Interestingly, the first recorded use of asphalt was in Babylon, from roughly the time that our text was written around 600 BCE. In fact, the images that Isaiah uses here are rooted in ancient engineering practices that were all about creating safe, efficient travel for kings. Royal engineers and workers were commissioned to cut through hillsides, to smooth uneven roads. These scenes would surely speak to the Israelites' dreams of finding a way out of exile and captivity, and a way home to Jerusalem.

Daniel Smith: But Isaiah was not merely preparing the way for a departure, but for an arrival, the arrival and embodiment of holiness itself, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. In the midst of a season of ungodly consumption, of increasingly profane public discourse, with political courage in exile and democracy in chaos, the question Isaiah asks us is this, "How can we make space? How can we make a way, not only a way out of the mess, but a way for the holy to enter in to our souls and to our world? What would it take to move those mountains of digital distraction, to remove those boulders of climate crisis despair, to dig down to that deep bedrock of our faith, to tap those wellsprings of divine hope and joy?"

Daniel Smith: Bear with me here, and just imagine you are in the cockpit of a Komatsu 575A the world's largest bulldozer. Your adrenaline rushes as the engine rumbles underneath your seat. You literally have the power to move mountains, to recast your every surrounding. Of all the things in this world that stand in the way of God's presence and holiness, where would you begin? Would you start with yourself, filling those valleys of insecurity that need lifting up? Would you raise those towering hilltops of perfectionism, or wreck those boulders of anxiety so that you can know better the gifts of your vulnerability and of God's grace?

Daniel Smith: Turning outwards, where would you begin with God's help if you could reshape our current political or social landscape? Would you head straight to DC? In this crowd, some of you may have a flight to catch already. But would you tear down prison walls, proclaim release to the captives? The season of Advent calls us to so much more than caroling and wreath-making and tree-trimming and holiday cheer. Advent calls us to change the very landscape of our being and of our world, to make clear a path for holiness to enter in, to set our feet again on a pilgrimage to the divine, to that ground of our being that is within and all around us, often just beneath the surface.

Daniel Smith: Take an extreme adventure today, and find holiness in sandboxes or on snow-covered yards, in spaces of child-like wonder, joy, and play. Let what is holy and loving emerge

and be born in you again like a child in the fullness of wonder and love. God has already created the world and declared it good. God's word has already become flesh. It is holy, and so are we, and everything around us for those with eyes to see and hear.

Daniel Smith: Later in Isaiah, a voice cries out, "Here is your God. Here is your God." Even here in this sanctuary of warmth and light, in this holy space of grace. Can you dig it? Let us pray.

Daniel Smith: Loving God, as we head into a winter wilderness today, equip us with your courage, power, and grace that we too can learn to clear a path for the holy. For then your glory shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together. Amen. And now let us share the words that Jesus taught us.

Congregation: 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 for ever and ever. Amen.

Lara Glass: Please stand as you are able to sing hymn number 96 in your crimson Memorial Church hymnal, On Jordan's Bank the Baptists Cry, number 96.

Congregation: (singing)

Lara Glass: May we live this day compassionate of heart, clear in word, gracious in awareness, courageous in thought, and generous in love. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.