

Lara Glass: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

Lara Glass: Welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for a responsive reading from your black Appleton Psalter, psalm number 4 found on page 2.

Lara Glass: Answer me when I call, O God of my right. You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.

Audience: How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies?

Lara Glass: But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for Himself. The Lord hears when I call to Him.

Audience: When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds and be silent.

Lara Glass: Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.

Audience: There are many who say, "O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!"

Lara Glass: You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound.

Audience: I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.

Lara Glass: You may be seated.

Choir: (singing.)

Westley Conn: A reading from the prophet Jonah, chapter four, beginning at the second verse. He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is it not this what I said well I was still in my own country? This is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing."

Westley Conn: Then Jonah went out of the city and set down east of the city and made a booth for himself there. The Lord God appointed a bush and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered.

Westley Conn: When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint, and asked that he might die. Then the

Lord said, "You are not concerned, or you are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor, and which you did not grow. It came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left, and many animals?"

Westley Conn: I like to think that one of my greatest assets is self-awareness. In many circles, introspection is a prized trait. I know my growing edges and my strengths. Colleagues and peers frequently describe me as reflective. I was confident in knowing who I am, but then I read Jonah.

Westley Conn: Like many of the other minor prophets, the book of Jonah is rather short. With only four chapters, it's a quick read. Tucked near the end of the Christian Old Testament between Obadiah and Micah, the book of Jonah is more than a peculiar story about a man who spends three days in the belly of a whale.

Westley Conn: I was incredulous when I reread this book. Here is a prophet of God, a man who was supposed to speak for God, who complained because God was gracious and merciful. Jonah wanted God to destroy the city of Nineveh and wipe out its inhabitants, who conveniently happened to be the enemies of Jonah. God was merciful and opted not to. Jonah's disgust at this is palpable and dramatic.

Westley Conn: Dismayed, he went out, built a tent, and still hoped for the destruction of the city. God saw petulant Jonah and offered a bush to shade him from the sun. But when the plant withered, Jonah again made a selfish complaint to God. This time about the loss of the plant, for the plant shaded him from the sun. This story ends oddly with God asking Jonah for permission to show mercy to his enemies.

Westley Conn: Reading Jonah made me question the book itself. Prophets are not supposed to be conceited. People of God are supposed to be joyous when God shows mercy, and are supposed to be filled with gratitude for God's graciousness. To me, Jonah seemed to embrace a self-serving faith where he is entitled to goodness and his enemies, God's wrath. He lacks empathy, and only cares about himself. Jonah is probably more of an anti-hero than a prophet.

Westley Conn: As I harshly critiqued Jonah, I slowly began to see these qualities in myself. How many times have I hoped, maybe even prayed, that God would cause my enemies to falter? When was the last time I sincerely rejoiced, without jealousy, over the success of someone other than myself? Where have I trod, with the heavy steps of entitlement?

Westley Conn: It turns out this is exactly the point of the book. The book of Jonah is intended for the reader, or the hearer, to begin to see herself in the person of Jonah. The book acts like a mirror. In Jonah, the worst parts of our character are reflected back to us. Acknowledging these darker sides of myself, it refreshed my humility

and awakened my compassion, though seeing my character flaws written in the Bible was unsettling.

Westley Conn: Just when I thought I knew who I was, Jonah showed me again the image of myself, one that I didn't really want to see. God's concluding question for Jonah then is ultimately a question for us. Can I show mercy to the Ninevites? In other words, are our enemies worthy of mercy? Are we worthy of mercy? If this minor prophet has taught us anything, the answer is yes.

Westley Conn: Let us pray.

Westley Conn: God, you have examined me and know all about me. Your knowledge is amazing to me. It is more than I can understand. Amen.

Audience: Amen.

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

Westley 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.

Lara Glass: Please stand as you are able to sing hymn number 40 in your Crimson Memorial Church hymnal. Morning Has Broken, number 40.

Choir/congregation: (singing)

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

Audience: Amen.