

Laurie Sedgwick:

Good morning. And welcome to morning prayers on a beautiful autumn day. Please stand, as you are able, for our responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book, today we'll be reading Psalm 157, found on page 84. 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.

Laurie Sedgwick:

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 do everything; herself unchanging, she make all things new; age after age she enters into holy soul, and makes them God's friends and prophets.

Laurie Sedgwick:

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

Congregation:

If riches are raised to be desired in life, what is richer than wisdom, the active cause of all things?

Laurie Sedgwick:

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 virtues; temperance and prudence, justice and fortitude, these are her teachings, and in the life of all there is nothing of more value than here.

Choir:

(singing)

Vanessa Zoltan:

"No reflection was to be allowed now. Not one glance was to be cast back, not even one forward." From chapter 27 of Jane Eyre. I wrote a book that came out a few months ago, called Praying with Jane Eyre. The premise of the book was that I wrote sermons using Jane Eyre as the lectionary instead of my traditional Torah. The reason that I wanted to use Jane Eyre instead of The Torah was simple. I'm the

grandchild of four Auschwitz survivors, and so can't quite make it through any single service of temple without thinking of one of most profaned places that has ever existed, which takes me out of my prayerful moment. And I think that prayerful moments, moments of deep contemplation and reflection are important. Prayerful moments are an opportunity to have what I like to call, better second thoughts. Often our first thoughts are not our most strategic, our most generous, our most inclusive, our most radical.

We need to take a moment of prayer and pause in order for our better, our good second thoughts, to come to us. So I pray with Jane Eyre, and not the Torah, so that I can practice that contemplation, then hopefully act on my better, second thoughts. My book was my attempt at reckoning with the fact that I was raised to judge the neighbors who did not try to hide or help my grandparents. And yet I am acutely aware that I do not think I am the kind of person who would have tried to hide or help my grandparents. My first thought may not be to invite in a neighbor, at risk to myself. And maybe in crisis, I wouldn't have the time to make space for a better second thought. In Jane Eyre, Jane meets the love of her life, Edward Rochester. They fall in love and are set to get married. On their wedding day, Jane finds out that Rochester is already married to Bertha Mason. Not only is Jane's fiancé already married, but he has locked his wife up in the attic. Bertha is locked up right above where Jane lays her head at night.

My favorite chapter of my favorite novel is the one in which Rochester and Jane are sousing out what to do now that Jane knows he's already married, and has locked up his wife. Rochester says, "My wife is mad, and yet I'm stuck being married to her forever. Let's, you and I Jane, run away together and live as man and wife. Whom would you offend by living with me?" Jane is incredibly attempted, but she decides to leave him anyway. She cannot run away with a man who's already married, for moral and logistical reasons. Jane knows she won't be strong enough to resist Rochester for long, so she runs away in the middle of the night. She nearly dies of starvation and exposure after she runs away. My book has been out in the world for months now, and yet something deeply central to my question of how can I use my sacred text, my prayerful moments, to try to make me a person who would hide my grandparents, just occurred to me last week. Why didn't Jane take Bertha with her when she fled? Now, having Bertha, who has been known to be violent and who may have severe mental health issues, would have only made Jane's already precarious situation, more difficult. And Bertha would have been in danger too.

Yes, Bertha wouldn't have been locked up anymore, but at least locked up she is warm and fed. Taking Bertha with Jane would have been incredibly difficult. Jane would not have been able to steal out in the middle of the night. She would have had to be planful and save some money. She'd probably have had to partner with Bertha's as caretaker at Grace Pool, who would have also been implicated and risking her livelihood. I am sure that I would also steal out in the night alone, like Jane. Jane tells us that quote, "No reflection was to be allowed now. Not one glance was to be cast back, not even one forward." And that's fair. If no reflection is allowed, of course, we act on our first thought.

We all have moments like that, which is why prayer, reflection, conversation, mornings like this, are so important. So that when we find ourselves in situations, when there isn't a moment for a glance to be cast back or forward, we've done the thinking ahead of time. Jane gets herself out, and that's amazing. So maybe my concern isn't why doesn't Jane take Bertha with her, but my concern is why doesn't Jane take a moments what she can, to get to her next, better thought. My problem isn't that Jane doesn't

take Bertha with her, but that she doesn't go back for Berth either. I know I don't want the limitations of my first, non-reflective thought, to be my reason for not helping the woman who is locked up right above my head.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Please stand, as you are able, and let us pray. Our Lord, our rock, our hearts rejoice in you. Holy one, our strengthened rises up with joy in your deliverance. You know, our every action and you lift up those who stumble. You who established the pillars of the earth, guard our hearts and guide our feet. So we might be now and ever faithful to your world transforming covenant of faithfulness. We pray in Jesus's name, who prays with us as we seek your kingdom. And now, let us recite together, the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying "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, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen." Let us sing the hymn, Give Us The Wings of Faith to Rise, number 84, found in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

Laurie Sedgwick:

Go forth in simplicity. Find and walk the path that leads to compassion and wisdom, that leads to happiness, peace and ease. Welcome the stranger and open your heart to a world in need of healing. Be courageous before the forces of hate, hold and embody a vision of the common good that serves the needs of all people. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.