

Laurie Sedgwick:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Laurie Sedgwick:

And welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for our responsive reading from the black Appleton psalter book. This morning, we'll be reading Psalm 148 found on page 74. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise him on high.

Congregation:

Praise him all his angels. Praise him all his hosts.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Praise him, sun and moon. Praise him all bright stars.

Congregation:

Praise him highest heavens and the waters that are above the heavens.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Let them praise the name of the Lord for it was who commanded that they be created.

Congregation:

He made them endure forever, establishing an order that shall never change.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Praise the Lord oh you who are on earth, all the sea monsters and ocean depths.

Congregation:

Fire and hail, snow and smoke, stormy wind executes his command.

Laurie Sedgwick:

All mountains and hills, all fruit trees and Cedars.

Congregation:

All wind and untamed beasts, creeping things and winged birds.

Laurie Sedgwick:

All Kings and peoples of the earth, all princes of earth and its judges.

Congregation:

Youths and maidens alike old and young together.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name, his alone, is sublime. His splendor covers earth and heaven.

Congregation:

He has exalted the horn of his people. For the glory of all his faithful ones. Israel and the people closest to him. Hallelujah. (singing)

Kent French:

Let us open our ears, our minds, our souls and imaginations for the good news from the Gospel of Matthew, starting in the fifth chapter, the 43rd verse. You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your parent in heaven. For God makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For the Word of God. Thanks be to God. As some of the long timers here among you know, this sanctuary has been a kind of spiritual incubator for me for the past 35 years. First as a member of the university choir, and much later as a worshiper and then as seminarian and undergraduate chaplain.

And it was in this formidable room, and from that crazily auspicious pulpit that I started learning something about preaching. It was in this room that my spiritual development started to mature, my vocational path started to form and something about the Spirit's tether has brought me back to it again recently, perhaps to find where God is leading me now. And before I say anything else, I want to say thank you to the current stewards of this office and for the choral fellows and their leaders for the gifts they bring day in and day out. And I pray that you never underestimate the soul nourishing power of keeping this place going daily with your music making, it is a gift and a treasure. Amen, amen. Returning more regularly to this space and to this worship, I've taken solace as a worshiper rather than a worship leader.

I've been recaptivated by the clear windows and the seasonal changing artwork of the foliage, by the curiosity inducing iconography at the top of the columns, the sense of a century's old tradition and as always the World War II Memorial Wall. And in scanning the wall, my eye has always gotten caught on that name in the far upper right corner, one of the two names from the divinity school, Adolf Sannwald, enemy casualty. When they unveiled this wall in 1951, there was a significant uproar about his name being included. Editorials in the Crimson saying things like it is obvious that he was not defending in any way the principles that have nourished Harvard. People apparently forgot that 20 years earlier, Dean Sperry advocated for a plaque over there on the north wall to remember two German lives from the first world war. Eventually it was announced that Sannwald's name would be removed.

However, the corporation let it go. And thanks to a website dedicated to his memory and some great work done in the mid 1990s by Joyce Palmer Ralph, I learned some things about him. Adolf Sannwald was the son of a mechanic. He grew to be six foot four, powerfully built, excelling in sports, and he loved the challenge of hard work. His university friends nicknamed him Saul. He was ordained a Lutheran pastor in 1923 and the following year Harvard offered him a one year scholarship where he became friends with a midwestern grad student in physics named Martin Grabow who 20 years later would

propose his name for the wall. Harvard offered Adolf a second year, but the German church called him back because of a shortage of young pastors.

And as early as 1931, his sermons caught the attention of and angered the Nazis as he was serving a Lutheran church in Stuttgart. By 1933, Hitler was consolidating churches into a German Christian movement, loyal to the state. And on the side of resistance to the confessing church of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Niemoller, Karl Barth, and hundreds of pastors, including Adolf Sannwald. In 1934, he published his own pamphlet called Why Not German Christian in which he wrote, God does not choose his children on the basis of race.

We may not and will not confuse faith in Jesus Christ with some other faith in a religious or political worldview. Eventually the Nazis would infiltrate local church councils and order church youth groups to become a part of the Hitler youth movement. And when the draft was instituted, Sannwald went ahead and enlisted out of a sense of patriotism, duty and of determination that Hitler not own the army as well. After he received several warnings from the Gestapo that his sermons could get him arrested, he accepted a call in the Black Mountains where his family would be safer. And in the large rectory there in which they lived, he provided a haven for fugitive Jews. His daughter remembered they just appeared for meals. We were not allowed to know their names because we might be questioned by the authorities and Christian children don't lie.

A parishioner recalled that Sannwald was always guided by his conscience in expressing himself unequivocally about God's will. He regularly oppressed the local Nazi leader about the rumors he was hearing of detainees being force marched into Poland and then disappearing. And for retribution, he was sent to the Russian front at age 41, where he served in menial jobs and a rank below private. He suffered frostbite, was injured and not allowed to become a chaplain because of his affiliation with the confessing church and his refusal to join the party.

He was allowed on one occasion to speak at an Easter service where he preached on resurrection and collective guilt. A month later, he died in an air raid, leaving behind a wife and five children. Just a name on that wall, Adolf Sannwald, enemy casualty. A life for trying to live faithfully and morally in a whole tortured, messed up global conflagration. His story reminds us that it's easy for us to paint our enemies near or far any color we want to, especially if we go on scraps of information and our own unchecked, lazy prejudices. It's often harder to see our enemies as fellow siblings in the humanity of God's family.

On this Tuesday after Thanksgiving, in Advent, I'm aware that loving our enemies may begin at home, as we learn to overcome the consequences of unskillful parenting, unresolved sibling rivalry, or both. Our loud and repetitive headlines about our division in this country just point to the dramatic conflicts in the larger human family. Now in my family, my brother and I sit on opposite sides of both the theological and political spectrum. We grew up with the same parents, the same school system, same church, and yet when presidential elections come around or traditional doctrines of the church, or most strikingly, when the litmus test of abortion comes up, as it is in the Supreme Court today, we go to our separate corners. The media outlets would tell you that we are enemies. On this week last year, he and I were both helping my mother to die peacefully and comfortably.

And for the last few months, we've started having weekly soul to soul check-ins. Perhaps because now in our fifties and sixties, we know that life is shorter than it used to be. Perhaps because we both try to follow Jesus and figure out what the gospel of love requires of us. Perhaps because we both believe in finding sensible, ethical solutions for people. And perhaps because we finally figured out that the humanity we share is essential to understanding the issues that divide us. Divisions that our politicians and news media like to magnify for their own gain in the 24/7 news cycle. As Jesus said, God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. And at any time we contain both evil and good, righteousness and unrighteousness. And at any time we are caught up in systems that have it all. May we have God's grace to see one another as we see ourselves, let us pray.

God, help us daily to remember that we are all your beloved children, all driven by thought and emotion, righteousness and unrighteousness, choices between good and evil. Help us to follow your will, to love your enemies, to love our enemies, real or perceived, and pray for those who persecute us, that we may all claim our place as your family members seeking to do your will as best we can. And as Jesus taught us, we are now bold to pray, our creator, 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.

Won't you please stand with me and let us sing to him. Let Lord Make us Servants of Your Peace. Number 313, found in your Crimson Harvard hymnal. (singing) Be people of peace. Let peace live in your heart and share the peace of Christ with all you meet. Share peace by acting out of compassion and not fear. Share peace by praying for our world. As you go out into the wonder of God's creations, share peace and hope with those you meet. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.