

Laurie Sedgwick:

Good morning, and welcome to morning prayers on this very chilly morning. This morning, we'll be starting with a responsive reading. Please stand as you are able, and we will be reading this morning Psalm 72, found on page 36 from your Black Appleton Soldier. "Give the king thy justice, O God. And my righteousness to the royal son."

Congregation:

"May he judge your people in righteousness, and thy poor with justice."

Laurie Sedgwick:

"Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in the righteousness."

Congregation:

"May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor."

Laurie Sedgwick:

"May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations."

Congregation:

"May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth."

Laurie Sedgwick:

"In his days, may righteousness flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more."

Congregation:

"May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river, to the ends of the earth."

Laurie Sedgwick:

"May all Kings fall down before him, all nations serve him."

Congregation :

"For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper."

Congregation :

(Singing)

Laurie Sedgwick:

So I have a confession to make, and that is that I am a novice at Bible study. So please forgive me the rudimentary nature of my words. But then again, there can be a wisdom in simplicity. Many of you are likely more acquainted with the Bible, cover to cover, than I, but I'm learning. And the more I read, the more intrigued and motivated I am to read more. It helps that I'm taking a class with Professor Teeter this semester. And Professor Teeter teaches Hebrew Bible. And it is an experience that one could only

have at Harvard. Professor Teeter comes to class every day, and presents as though he is talking about the most exciting thing in the world. It is the Super Bowl or the Olympics of biblical studies.

Professor Teeter correlates the complexities of Bible to jazz scores, in dissecting passages, most recently, Isaiah, he shows how what may appear to make little sense actually is a highly sophisticated structure of repetitions, and syntax. One can't help but share in Professor Teeter's enthusiasm. One of my other classes this semester is public preaching with Dan Smith. It's a privilege to be in this course with Dan, who is a prodigy of Peter Gomes, and has the stories to back that up. For a first sermon, I was assigned the Book of Jonah. All I knew of Jonah was probably what everyone else recalls of Jonah when referenced. He's the guy in the whale.

Well, yes, there's that, but there's so much more. In the process of my close reading and research, I've developed a real appreciation, or call it love, for this guy, Jonah. A few high level facts about the Book of Jonah. It's the only book of the 12 prophets, where it's really just a story about Jonah, and an action-packed story at that, and a story where Jonah and God have quite a few conversations. All the other prophet books are primarily prophets passing along the word of God. And Jonah is a passionate guy. He gets angry at God, and lets him know it. He deliberately disobeys God. And he even argues with God.

At the beginning of the story, God commands Jonah to go to Nineveh, and warn the Ninevites that, if they don't mend their evil ways, God is going to bring wrath. So Jonah sets out, but in the opposite direction, he gets on a ship, he gets thrown overboard by the crew, because he's the cause of the rough seas and storm, and he gets swallowed by a whale. But after praying and asking for forgiveness from inside the whale, he gets spat out. He then reluctantly travels to Nineveh. You see, he doesn't want to tip the Ninevites off to God's wrath, because they're enemies of his homeland, Israel.

So here comes the one prophecy in the entire book, proclaimed by Jonah. 40 more days and Nineveh will be overthrown. And that's it. One thing we learned about Jonah is that he does not like to be wrong. And the worst thing ever is to be proclaimed a false prophet. Sure enough, the people of Nineveh listen to him, and clean up their act. So God has mercy on them. And this really makes Jonah mad. He says to God, "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God. Slow to anger, and abounding in love. And God who relents from sending calamity. Now Lord, take away my life for it is better for me to die than to live."

And I would say that's a little melodramatic, but as Professor Teeter might explain, strategically used for dramatic effect. So then God has a conversation with Jonah, and asked him why he should be so mad. Jonah doesn't answer, but he sulks away to the outskirts of town. Apparently, it's very hot there. So Jonah builds himself a little lean to, and to sulk in the shade. The next thing we know is that God grows him a plant to help him feel even more shaded and comfortable. And then during the night, God also lets loose the little worm who then by morning destroys the tree. Jonah is now really upset by this.

And here's the gem of the story. And also the way it ends. God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is." He said, "And I'm so angry, I wish I were dead." But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight, and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which

there are more than 120,000 people, who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and so many animals?"

And that's the end of the Book of Jonah. This gem of a book prompts so many questions, and raises a number of themes too many to cite here. But the primary question, the question that lingers at the end of the story, and demands exploration is, as asked of Jonah, of us really by God, is, "Should my love not extend to the thousands, the millions of people in the great cities of the world, and even to the animals?" Now, please stand as you are able and let us pray.

Show us your ways, O Lord. Lead us in your truth, and teach us. Open our eyes, minds, and hearts to know your will and to follow it. Reveal your vision for us, and keep us focused and faithful to what you would have us do. Bring us together to worship, and work for your purpose, and move us forward into your future. Amen. And now, let us together recite 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 for ever and ever. Amen."

Let us sing together the hymn, I Heard The Voice of Jesus Say, number 3:20, found in your Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation:
(Singing)

Laurie Sedgwick:

May the spirit and light of this morning, and the special spirit and light of this church and community bless us all, watch over us and protect us on our journey, and open us from the darkness into the light of peace, and hope, and transfiguration. May the spirit of the Sacred Trinity, the light of nature, and all good spirits and angels, and our friends among the dead, bless us and heal us. Amen.

Congregation :
Amen.