

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. This morning, we'll be reading Psalm 105 found on page 53. We give you thanks, O God, and call upon your Name; we make known your deeds among the peoples.

Congregation:

We sing to you; we sing your praise and speak of all your marvelous works.

Laurie Sedgwick:

We glory in your holy Name; let the hearts of those who seek you rejoice.

Congregation:

We search for you and your strength; we continue to seek your face.

Laurie Sedgwick:

You spread out a cloud for a covering and a fire to give light in the night season.

Congregation:

You opened rock and water flowed, so the river ran in the dry places.

Laurie Sedgwick:

For you remembered your holy word and Abraham your servant.

Congregation:

So you led forth your people with gladness, your chosen with shouts of joy.

Laurie Sedgwick:

You gave your people the lands of the nations, and they took the fruit of others' toil.

Congregation:

That they might keep your statutes and observe your laws. Alleluia!

Choir:

(Singing)

The Rev. Alanna C. Sullivan:

I know this is uncouth for morning prayers, but that was such a bomb choir. It was so beautiful and holy. So I would be amiss if I didn't note that.

Our reading for today comes from the prophet Isaiah. For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many people. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war anymore.

A few years ago, prior to COVID, I found myself standing outside a railway station on the outskirts of Berlin. We had arrived at the train station after having driven down a long winding road. There were wide sidewalks and ancient sturdy elm trees that lined the street. And the Elm trees outstretched branches created canopy over the street. We passed by large stately homes with meticulous lawns, no unpruned bush or overgrown grass in sight. And the train depot was at the end of a cul-de-sac, matching the houses around it. The train station was built in a Tudor Revival fashion, complete with stucco and half timbering facade, complimented by intricate brickwork. And there was a large gold plated clock that perched the top. And that morning there was not a cloud in the sky and the scene was silent. It was if someone had pressed a pause button.

And what particularly struck me in that moment was how familiar it all felt. It reminded me of the commuter rail station where my family used to drop off and pick up my mom every morning. And it was at this place on October 18th, 1941... A place that felt all too familiar, that the Reich Main Security Office in conjunction with the Reich Ministry of Transport deported over a thousand Jews from Berlin to the Łódź Ghetto in Poland. It would be the first of 186 deportations that would happen there from 1941 to 1945. And on that day in 1941, local police and SS officers rounded up over 1,200 people from a collection camp in Berlin. That same site, not too long beforehand, had been a synagogue.

And they then marched the men and women and children five miles by foot to this train station. And this particular train station had been chosen, because the office believed that the long lines of Jews waiting on the ramp towards the platform would not be so visibly public. It was deemed that the well-to-do Berliners living in this posh district of villas was less likely to erupt in protest.

Now, at first for these deportations, the trains consisted of passenger cars and were headed to ghettos in Eastern Europe. But by 1942, the Nazis increasingly began to use cattle cars for the deportations. And instead the destinations were directly to death camps. This was Track 17. And today there is a Memorial built there on the Track 17. It is a reconstruction of the loading bay and train platform as it was during that time. The train station is actually still in operation, but after the war, alternative rail lines were built nearby. And now at the end of Track 17, it is broken and overrun by trees. Trees almost as if to say, we don't want to see trains here again. And standing on that platform, I began to take in my surroundings differently. It was hard to admire the stately homes and their manicured lawns. When I realized how much attention was paid to the length of grass and the height of bushes. And so little attention was paid to the happenings right beyond the property lines.

And that silence no longer felt calming. It was haunting. That day has stayed with me. I'm sure you have days that stay with you as well. Those moments when you not only remember what things looked like, but how they sounded and how they tasted, how they smelled, how it felt. And this memory often catches me off guard when I do remember it.

In our lesson for today, the prophet Isaiah casts a grand vision for a time when people of all nations, cultures, and races, and identities will be drawn to God and God's justice will reign. Isaiah's vision of the future could stop there, but it doesn't. The prophecy is about hope for how we will shape our lives today. A sword can become a plowshare, a spear can become a pruning hook. A train can become a vehicle for death, an implement of destruction can become a tool for cultivation. These transformations may be what is yet to come, but they are also about where we have been and where we are today.

And there is a calling in Isaiah's vision for us. We have a part to play in transforming Isaiah's dream into reality. It is true that humans have the capacity for great evil, but they also have the capacity for abundant creation. The hope for a future may belong to God, but God invites us into the formation of that future.

As I have been speaking with some folks at this community, it has felt like a particularly dark time and the light of hope can feel dim. But it is when the days are short and the challenges are long that it is precisely now that we most need that promise that is given. The prophecy that holds out for the hope of something better, but it also challenges us to be agents in the creation of that future. Amen.

Laurie Sedgwick:

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.

Laurie Sedgwick/Congregation:

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, for ever and ever. Amen.

Laurie Sedgwick:

And let us sing the hymn, Immortal Invisible God Only Wise, Number 203 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 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.