

Anna Burham:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Anna Burham:

And welcome to morning prayers at Memorial Church. Today's service will begin with the responsive reading from the black Appleton psalter book. Psalm 54, found on page 27. Please stand as you are able to read responsively by the whole verse.

Anna Burham:

Save me, O God, by your name and vindicate me by your might.

Congregation:

Hear my prayer, O God. Give ear to the words of my mouth.

Anna Burham:

For the insolent have risen against me, the ruthless seek my life. They do not set God before them.

Congregation:

But surely God is my helper. The Lord is the upholder of my life.

Anna Burham:

He will repay my enemies for their evil. In your faithfulness, put an end to them.

Congregation:

With a freewill offering I have sacrificed to you. I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good.

Anna Burham:

For he has delivered me from every trouble and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Dan Smith:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Dan Smith:

For our reading today, I'd like to offer a timely excerpt from the 1950s journal of an Austrian Catholic writer named Ida Gorres. "Holy week is beginning again," she writes. "And here I am once more, feeling so unadjusted to it. So utterly inadequate. Not that heart of stone feeling. Simply the sense of being completely out of proportion. Something momentous like the Niagara Falls is thundering down right beside me, and there I stand with a thimble in my hand and I'm supposed to dip in and collect something, catch it up, assimilate, reacting properly. Goodness knows how, but if you hold a cup under a waterfall, it's not only knocked right out of your hand, but empty to boot. The rushing, tumbling water rebounds. The only hope of scooping anything at all is to hold the cup up carefully at the very edge under a lost, thin trickle."

Thanks to a tattered collection of daily devotionals I've been reading almost every year for many years now, this watery image has met and guided me through my own entry into holy week for almost two decades. Though I didn't preach yesterday, I was reminded again of Gorres' words as we shared that Palm Sunday story at First Church. In my mind's eyes, I imagined Jesus and the crowds, filling the streets atop the Mount of Olives, flooding them and then flowing, cascading even, down through them in that counter-cultural, anti-imperial procession, right down into the royal and tumult that awaits him and us in Jerusalem and in the events of this week. Hosannas, donkeys and branches waving all the way, instead of hail Herods, stallions and swords bracing.

If we pick up the story in Luke's gospel today, the very next line shows Jesus pausing. Verse 41. As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace."

And here I see even his tears flowing into that powerful and preemptive rush of divine love and peace-seeking purpose. His vocation is clear by way of the cross and his rising. He's called to know and understand the depths of our pain and suffering and death, yet also to embody a love that is stronger than our fears, more lasting than empire, more powerful than death. At Easter, god's love comes through it and flows on in new life and love and joy.

But still, in the rush of this week, it can be too much to grasp. We can too quickly lose the plot. So I circle back to Gorres and those Niagara Falls. Her journal entry continues. "This is how it is with me. I'm standing as near as I can get to the cataract. The thunder and roar of the water is deafening. I can catch next to nothing and I know very well that one step near and I'll be caught up or swept away. But maybe this helpless state of just standing aside, this overpowering sense of not being able to do anything about it is the only sort of adoration I am allowed just now. This too is one way of divining the immense of this tremendous mystery of paying reverence, at least, to something surpassing by far either comprehension or emotion."

Whether you are a Christian observing this holy week or not, I wonder if this imagery might find a resonance within you. Consider the steady crush of headlines that daily pour into our inboxes and devices, or that cascade of campus and course deadlines at this type time of year especially, let alone whatever else may be coursing through those existential streams of our individual and family lives right now.

Even without this millennia-old drama of holy week, we can relate, can't we? There's an all most crushing weight of all that's going on in our world and lives right now. And the question remains, how do we bear witness and stay connected to the flow of loving purpose, not be drawn under or overwhelmed by the relentless pressure and demands of our warring, yet at wondrous world?

Perhaps Gorres offers just the humility and wisdom and posture we need. Did you hear it? The invitation to stand just aside, to de-center ourselves, to right size our expectations of our capacity, so as not to get swept up in our ego-driven efforts to understand it all, to know it all, to respond to it, to fix it, to own it. Instead, draw near as you can to the realities of the pain and the power it represents. Stay present. Bear witness helplessly, and humbly add your own tears to the flow. And in so doing, learn that of course it's all too much to hold alone. We need each other. We need that greater beyond human love and purpose to guide us through.

For persons of faith, especially as we prepare to hear again Christ's passion and agony, there is also an invitation, I believe, to hold fast to the enduring strength of God's love, to the promise that justice will yet roll down like water and righteousness as an ever-flowing stream. Can we imagine grasping even a thimble full of that power? Even to feel the mist of its companionship and hope? Can we imagine that cup being filled?

Holy week is here. Let us enter in. Will you pray with me, please? God, help us to take hold of whatever thimbles or cups we can find and hold on tight, fill them with moments of reverence and adoration, that your mystery and loving purpose revealed this week, that we may yet recognize the things that make for peace. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Anna Burham:

Please stand, and together, let us recite the words that Jesus taught us, saying, our father-

Congregation:

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.

Anna Burham:

Together let us sing the hymn, My Faith Looks UP to Thee, number 155, found in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing).

Anna Burham:

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May we go forth into this holy week in peace and anticipation and in reflection, and may we draw closer to God and to each other this day and every day. And let us say, "Amen."

Congregation:

Amen.