

Lauria Sedgwick:

O sing unto the Lord a new song. Sing unto the LORD, all the earth.

Audience:

Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; show forth his salvation from day to day.

Lauria Sedgwick:

Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people.

Audience:

For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised. He is to be feared above all gods.

Lauria Sedgwick:

Give unto the Lord, o ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength.

Audience:

Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. Bring an offering, and come into his courts.

Lauria Sedgwick:

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Fear before him, all the earth.

Congregation:

Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth. The world also shall be established that it shall not be moved. He shall judge the people righteously.

Lauria Sedgwick:

Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof.

Congregation:

Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein. Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice.

Lauria Sedgwick:

Before the Lord, for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

Choir:

(singing)

Cindy Gao:

It's an honor to be sharing this space with you all this morning. My name is Cindy and I'm a senior in Adam's House. Today's reading will be coming from Matthew, chapter 10, 34 to 37.

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I do not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household. Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

This is God's word. You may be wondering about the verses I've chosen to read this morning. They seem intense. But it's precisely verses like these that have been so thought provoking in my journey thinking through meaning and purpose. Verses like these have brought me out of darkness, into new life. And new life for me always begins with questions. One of the biggest questions I've ever asked myself is whether our cultural belief that family is everything is true.

I grew up fully believing that my life's meaning and purpose was to fulfill my parents' desires and expectations. On the surface, I was this high-achieving, golden child, but my selfhood was defined by the perceptions of everyone else around me. Even though I had all of these achievements under my belt, I constantly felt not good enough. I felt completely lost, having given all of myself to my family. They always told me that nobody would love me as much as they did and I fully believed it.

It was the Bible that led me to question this. Verses like the ones I just read led me to consider that perhaps blood connection does not always equal love. Familial relationships can sometimes be toxic and I think evil has so much a gain by tricking us into believing that we deserve the toxic relationships we feel stuck in. Toxic relationships affect our understanding of who we are and who God is. They destroy our self-worth and our overall health. Ultimately, they steal our love, for who can accept a love they do not believe exists for them. And when love seems scarce, we cannot give it away freely.

It takes a lot of courage to acknowledge family dysfunction. I think it's an act of love. Perhaps love doesn't look the way we expect it to, with all the nice warm fluffy feelings. It looks like death on a cross. It looks like grief. It looks like painful, hard truth. But isn't acknowledging and accepting the truth of what we've experienced and what a relationship truly is a greater act of love than pretending it is something that it's not? Because how do we truly love something that we cannot bear to see?

After acknowledging the truth, we continue the act of love by believing that we, as well as those who have heard us, are worthy, despite our brokenness, dysfunction and flaws. To be clear, this belief does not necessarily lead to reconciliation, but rather it is a humility and a surrender to God's love for each of us. In the midst of feelings of hopelessness and despair, love guides us to find hope and choose faith. We reclaim the stolen love of toxic relationships by courageously surrendering to a love that exists for us, despite our flaws. This is what it means to me to have faith.

Meaning and purpose flow out of this identity. We have been made and we are worthy of love and restoration. Faith gives me the eyes to see that my family is made up of flawed human beings who have loved me in the best way that they know how. The truth of their dignity and my own must be named like a new mercy each morning, and it is an act of love and restoration. To believe we are worthy of love and salvation is to bring God's shalom to the world. To believe we are worthy of love and salvation is to believe that we have been made.

I often hear sermons pushing us to repentance and guilt and acknowledgement of our unworthiness. I wanted to finish with an excerpt of Cole Arthur Riley's book called This Here Flesh. It reads, "People say we are unworthy of salvation. I disagree. Perhaps we are very much worth saving. It seems to me that God is making miracles to free us from the shame that haunts us. Maybe the same hand that made garments for a trembling Adam and Eve is doing everything he can that we might come a little closer. Our liberation begins with the irrevocable belief that we are worthy to be liberated, that we are worthy of a life that does not degrade us, but honors our whole selves. When you believe in your dignity, or at least someone else does, it becomes more difficult to remain content with the bondage with which you have become so acquainted. You begin to wonder what you were meant for. So, bear your teeth as you smile, grease that scalp, relax those shoulders, hold your arms like their weight is in glory. You have been made."

Thank you. And I will pass it on to Lauria to lead us in the Lord's prayer.

Lauria Sedgwick:

Will you please rise as you are able? And let us pray. We praise thee, o God, for the full revelation of thyself in Jesus Christ and in his church, and for the lamp onto our feet and the light onto our path. For that light and for its source we give thee thanks now and forever. Amen.

Lauria Sedgwick:

And now let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us.

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.

Lauria Sedgwick:

Let us sing the hymn A Brighter Dawn Is Breaking, number 170, found in your Crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

Lauria Sedgwick:

May the spirit and light of this day and the special spirit and light of Memorial Church 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 in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.