

Laurie Sedgwick:

Good morning.

Church 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. And this morning, we'll be reading Psalm 130, found on page 65.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Out of the depths, I have called to you, oh God, hear my voice. Let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.

Church Congregation:

If you were to note what is done amiss, oh God, who could stand?

Laurie Sedgwick:

For there is forgiveness with you, therefore you shall be feared.

Church Congregation:

I wait for you, oh God, my soul waits for you, in your Word is my hope.

Laurie Sedgwick:

My soul waits for you, more than centuries for the morning, more than centuries for the morning.

Church Congregation:

Oh, Israel, wait upon God, for with God, there is mercy.

Laurie Sedgwick:

With God there is plenteous redemption. God shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

Choir:

(Singing)

William Swett:

The philosopher Susan Wolf wrote, when I visit my brother in the hospital, or help my friend move, or stay up all night sewing my daughter a Halloween costume, I act neither for egoistic reasons or for moral ones. I do not believe that it is better for me that I spend a depressing hour in a drab, cramped room seeing my brother irritable and in pain, that I risk back injury trying to get my friend's sofa safely down two flights of stairs, or that I forgo hours of much-wanted sleep to make sure that the wings will stand out at a good angle from the butterfly costume my daughter wants to wear in the next day's parade. But

neither do I believe myself, duty-bound, to perform these acts, or fool myself into thinking that by doing them, I do what will be best for the world.

I act neither out of self-interest, nor out of duty, or any other sort of impersonal or impartial reason. Rather, I act out of love. My senior thesis in philosophy was on the topic of how we can justify our actions and commitments without appealing either to moral duties or self-interest. Though it appeared nowhere in my thesis, the commitment I had in mind was playing the double bass. I've played the bass since I was 11. I've studied at conservatories in New York and Boston and performed at concert halls around the world. But if you ask me why I play the bass, I have no answer. As I like to retort to those much too friendly people on the tee who ask me as I haul the base over a turn-style, why didn't you play the Piccolo? Well, sir, I'm really not sure.

Of course, I could give you a biographical explanation. I started playing the bass in fifth grade, the year after my older sister died. One day, I learned about the bass in school and told my mother about it. Willing to do anything to make me happy, she signed me up for lessons. As I grew up, the bass became a way for me to become closer to my older brother, a cellist. He and I became friends by playing cello bass duets. On a lighter note, there is also a market explanation for why I play. The demand for good basses is high. The supply is low. Then again, they also say that about piccolos. The aesthetic explanation, I admit, is the strongest. There is nothing I find quite so satisfying as filling a hall with the sound of a bowed low E string or a G harmonic pizzicato. Still, the real explanation I've always searched for is what makes my attachment to this gargantuan instrument worthwhile?

What kind of reason can I give to justify why I keep playing? Why am I spending next year studying bass performance at New England Conservatory? Is there some ultimate justification for that? Susan Wolf thinks there is. She argues that there are reasons called reasons of love. Reasons of love are reasons we give when we visit someone in the hospital or help a friend out. We do so neither out of self-interest nor moral duty. Wolf would say, I play the bass out of love. I do not just play the bass for myself, I play it for you, the audience. I also do not just play the bass because it is my duty. If I suddenly stop playing, I hope no one would say I'm immoral for having done so. Moreover, Wolf thinks only some reasons of love can be justified.

To assess whether or not something is worth loving, Wolf says, we need to step all the way back from our lives and adopt an objective view. Almost like a God's eye view on ourselves. By adopting this view, we see which commitments are valuable in the grand scheme of things and which are not. To the question of whether or not playing the double bass is ultimately justified is ultimately worthwhile, Wolf says, I can have the answer I've been searching for. Yes. My love of the bass is justified. And that is where I disagree with Wolf. I realized this while I was with a group of musicians from the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra in Cremona, Italy over spring break. While there, I played in a masterclass for one of the greatest living bass players in the world. The maestro stopped me midway through my performance to tell me in broken English, you have many problem.

He was right, I played terribly. I had not practiced. My thesis was due in a week. What I realized after that performance was that in writing a philosophy thesis on the topic of how we justify our commitments, I had inadvertently ignored the very commitment I wanted to understand, the

justification of the bass. For as long as I've played music, I've tried to justify it. I've tried to figure out what makes it objectively worthwhile. Wolf perfectly articulates the view I've been looking for. And I'm thankful to her because she's made me realize that I went wrong by looking. The bass is just what I do. It is what I love. I do not expect everyone to understand my love for the bass. Least of all when I'm carrying it around Boston. In that sense, it is not objective. But what I do hope and believe to be true is that we all can appreciate that we all love something, all love someone, and let's just leave it at that. Let us have a moment of silence, to think about what we love most.

William Swett:

Thank you.

Laurie Sedgwick:

Will you please stand with me and let us pray.

God of light and love help us this day to worship you with all of our hearts, minds, and bodies. Shower us with the grace of your spirit that we might joyfully receive the message you have for us today. Amen.

Church Congregation:

Amen.

Laurie Sedgwick:

And now, let us recite together the prayer that Jesus taught us saying...

Church 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 breath 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, forever and ever. Amen.

Laurie Sedgwick:

And let us sing the hymn, Whate'er my God Ordains is Right, number 205 in your Crimson Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing).

Laurie Sedgwick:

All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey toward your infinite light. We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us we pray in our struggle for justice, love, and peace. Amen.

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Church Congregation:

Amen.