

Speaker 4:

(Music).

Stef Grossana:

Good morning, and welcome to morning prayers. Our speaker this morning will be Shariah Anderson. She's a second-year master of divinity student at Harvard Divinity School. Our service will begin this morning with a reading of Psalm 40. Please rise in body or spirit as we read the Psalm responsibly by whole verse.

I waited patiently for you, oh God. You stooped me and heard my cry.

Congregation:

You lifted me out of the vessel of the pit, out of the miry clay. You set my feet upon a high cliff and made my feet sure.

Stef Grossana:

You put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.

Congregation:

Many shall seek, stand tall, and put their trust in you.

Stef Grossana:

In sacrifice and offering, you take no pleasure. You have given me ears to hear you.

Congregation:

Burnt offerings and sin offerings, you did not require. [inaudible 00:05:55].

Stef Grossana:

In the role of the book it is written concerning me, I love to do your will, oh my God, your law is deep in my heart.

Congregation:

I proclaim righteousness in the great congregation. Behold, I have not restrained my lips, O Lord, you know.

Stef Grossana:

Your righteousness, have I not hidden in my heart? I have spoken your faithfulness and your deliverance. I have not concealed your love and faithfulness from the great congregation.

Congregation:

You are the holy one. Do not withhold your passion from me. Let your love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever.

Speaker 4:

(Music).

Shariah Anderson:

I'm not sure how we're all showing up this morning. Maybe it was a little difficult getting here, getting up this morning. Maybe you're having a really great hair day. It's a good morning for you. But despite the different ways we might be showing up, I'd like to invite you all to take a deep breath with me. And as you do so, I want you to take in anything that might be hindering you from being present in this moment. And as you exhale, I would just encourage you to allow that to be the confirmation that you can be attentive here. Please take a breath with me. And now that you hopefully feel more present and connected in this moment, let's pray. Hey, God, thank you for this day and the opportunity to see it. Thank you for the opportunity to be used by you. Please speak through me. I pray that no one would hear what Shariah had to say, but simply what you had to say through me. In Jesus name, my prayer, amen.

This morning I'd like to talk about God, gratitude, and good movies all in about five minutes. So let me get to it. One of my favorite childhood movies is Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, specifically the 2005 version. I got some head nods. And I want to focus on one of the characters in that movie. If you're unfamiliar with the movie, the plot is that there is this world-renowned chocolatier, and he invites five lucky children to come to his one-of-a-kind, chocolate factories. The only caveat is that in order to accept this invitation, you have to find a golden ticket wrapped under a candy bar. And so of the five children who win this award, this invitation, is Varuca Salt, who is the daughter of a very wealthy family.

And so her father presents her with this ticket, and as she walks to him in expectation, she looks in admiration at the ticket and then looks up at him and requests a new podium, not a thank you, not a please, not an acknowledgement of the hard work that her father went through to reward her with her initial request of this ticket, but she has something else. And I think we as people can also relate to Varuca. We oftentimes are not satisfied with the good gifts that God gives us. We're expecting enough to ask for the thing, but human enough to have our next request ready at any given moment. And so I would even go as far to say that we as people, take it a step further by basing God's goodness, God's presence, or even God's trustworthiness on rather His ability to give, instead of who He is. We might not say it aloud, but if God doesn't heal the person, if God doesn't bless the relationship, if God doesn't pay the bill, we then deem God as as bad as our circumstances.

But I want to ask you a question. What if God uses the difficult times to show us His goodness instead? If you'll indulge me for the next two minutes, I want to talk to you from the subject Holy Hardship.

Reading from the Book of Psalm in the 118:24, according to the English standard version, the text reads, "This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." And you might be wondering, what does it look like to rejoice and be glad in a moment where you have nothing to rejoice and be glad about? How does one do so without faking it until you make it? I'm so glad you asked. You rejoice and be glad by understanding that God is not good based on how well things are going for you. He is good because He is God and because He is God, He is good, no matter if life is or not. I'll say it again so that you'll allow it to resonate in your spirit.

God is not good based on how well things are going for you. He is good because He is God and because He is God, He therefore is good no matter if life is or not. And secondly, you remember the God owes you nothing. And so with that perspective, everything can be considered a blessing. Psalm 118 is known as a prayer of praise, one that the Israelites would recite in moments of crisis or in remembrance of God. As you grapple with seeing God's goodness in the midst of hardship and difficulty like we see here with the Israelites, I want to encourage you to hold onto your ability to praise in your ability to

remember. Praise in Him, because if you do it loud enough and long enough, you'll see walls fall down, ask Joshua.

But then also remembering the reassurance that He gives us time and time again and scripture of His faithfulness. In the highs and the lows, you find the presence of God and once you've tasted and seen Him, there's a fullness you'll experience that will never go away. We rejoice and be glad, not because we are certain of what the day holds, but because of the awareness that we have of the one who holds it. Hardship is holy because God is holy and He is with you in every season. In her book *Holier Than Thou*, Jackie Hill Perry reminds us that God is holy and therefore, if He is holy, then He cannot sin against you. May that be enough information for you to rejoice and be glad in this day that He has made. Thank you. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for the assurance of your presence, despite whether we can feel it or not. I pray that we would seek you not for what you can give, but for who you are. I pray for the desire to repent for the ways we have not aligned with your will, the desire to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, and the desire to know you more intimately. Thank you for this time together. In Jesus name I pray, amen.

If you're able and willing, please join me in the Lord's prayer. 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 to temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Stef Grossana:

Please rise in body or spirit as we sing hymn 288.

Speaker 4:

(Music).

Stef Grossana:

As we go into this day, may we remember that in the goodness of God, we were brought into this world. By the grace of God, we have been kept all the day long, even unto this very hour. And by the love of God, we are being made whole. Go in peace. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.