Harry Potter and the Sacred Text 3.19- The Servant of Lord Voldemort: Mercy

Vanessa: Chapter Nineteen: The Servant of Lord Voldemort.

“Hermione screamed. (intro music begins) Black leapt to his feet. Harry jumped as though he’d received a huge electric shock. ‘I found this at the base of the Whomping Willow,’ said Snape, throwing the cloak aside...”

Vanessa: I’m Vanessa Zoltan

Casper: And I’m Casper ter Kuile

Vanessa: And this is Harry Potter and the Sacred Text.

(Intro music fades)

Vanessa: Our big announcement for today, Casper, is that Arianna and I are going to be leading an old-school Harry Potter and the Sacred Text Community Class in Chicago on August 10th at 7:00pm at the Harold Washington Library. It is free and open to the public and we are really excited to see you there. Bring Prisoner of Azkaban, we’re going to be looking at the very last chapter of the book and doing some Lectio together and just, you know, doing our old-fashioned community class, what this whole podcast is based on. I will miss you, of course. Casper, it is your turn to start us with a story, what have you got for us today?

Casper: There’s a very famous Rembrandt painting in The Hermitage in St. Petersburg and it was one of the last paintings that he painted before he died, and it’s of the biblical story of the prodigal son. So really the focus of the painting is the young son who grew up in a wealthy household and selfishly asked for his inheritance early and went out into the world and threw it all away and ended up in dire poverty when he realizes, “I should return to my father and I will not be his son, but I will work on the farm with the other laborers.” And so he’s kneeling in this painting, and he’s lost a sandal and he’s wearing rags. And to the right of him stands the other brother who is richly clothed in a beautiful robe. And that brother has followed the rules all through his life, he’s worked hard, he’s never complained, he’s not asked for his inheritance early. And so he’s looking on as their father embraces the young son, as he’s welcomed home. And the father says, “let’s celebrate the fact that this child is returned, I thought he was lost and now he’s found. Let’s slaughter the fat calf and I’m going to give him a ring and give him new shoes. And the older brother is annoyed because he’s been the good child and has worked really hard and has never asked for much and here’s this wasteful child returning and all the gifts have been given to him. But the painting, I think is striking on it’s own, but there’s a wonderful commentary on this painting by Henri Nouwen who’s a Dutch Catholic priest, who wrote a book basically doing a sacred reading of this painting and thinking about the spiritual life as a journey through each of these three characters. That we all start rejecting where we come from, like the younger son and return, but that we’re also like the older son and jealous of other
people who have a good time and resentful. But his conclusion is that really the journey of spiritual growth or maturation is one to becoming the father, that we no longer need forgiveness or mercy, but that we’re the ones who give it. And that struck me so much as we read this chapter through the theme of mercy, and we’re returning to that theme we started *Prisoner of Azkaban* with that theme and I think there’s so much to unpack there. And it challenged me because it reframed the process of becoming more human as one of maybe becoming more merciful. So I wanted to talk about that theme with you today.

Vanessa: Casper, I’ve been sitting here looking at this painting and it’s so beautiful and I love the idea that the maturation process is sort of a process of becoming more and more merciful. And I’m really excited to talk to you because Harry, who’s so young, is so merciful in this chapter. And Snape, who is supposed to be this mature Professor, is so withholding of this mercy. And so I’m really excited to talk to you about this today.

Casper: Vanessa, it’s time for the 30 Second Recap. I feel like there’s a lot of action in this chapter and so I’m excited to see your movie-voiceover voice, like I think that’s exciting.

Vanessa: Oh okay, I sort of like that approach.

Casper: (deep voice) In a world…

Vanessa: (deep voice) In a world in which Snape is a total jerk…

Casper: (deep voice) Yeah!

Vanessa: Just kidding.

Casper: Okay we’ve got thirty seconds on the clock. Here we go: 3, 2, 1, go.

(Ticking noise)

Vanessa: So Snape is like “Hi, it’s me,” and he’s like, “Lupin you’re a werewolf and Sirius you’re a murderer and so I’m going to have the Dementors kill you both.” And then the kids knock him out. And Sirius wants to kill Pettigrew and Harry is like, “no don’t kill him, my parents wouldn’t want you to become a murderer.” And they’re like, “Okay we’re going to go out and we’re going to turn in Peter Pettigrew and everything is going to be okay. And Harry will you live with me?” And he’s like, “Yes, of course,” and it ends sort of happy.

(Buzzing noise—103 words in 30 seconds)

Casper: Pretty good.

Vanessa: Thank you.
Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: Casper are you ready to fill in all the blanks that I, no doubt, left in?

Casper: Sure thing.

Vanessa: On your mark, get set, go.

(Ticking noise)

Casper: (deep voice) In a world where you’ve been living as a rat for the last twelve years, and you’re caught by your old best friends who you used to look up to, and your new owner thinks you’re a rat but you’re actually a man—now comes the time when you transform. And so Peter Pettigrew becomes a man again and Harry really believes Sirius and he’s like, “oh my god I believe you.” And Pettigrew is like, “no, someone help me, no no no.” And then yeah, Harry saves him and like they float Sirius…no they float Snape down the corridor and everyone comes out, and but…

(Buzzing noise—106 words in 30 seconds!)

Vanessa: You kept that shtick going for a while, that was impressive.

Casper: About halfway through I was like, “ahhhhhhh.”

Vanessa: But I really thought you were going to stop after, “in a world,” but you just kept going.

Casper: Well you know I’m feeling extra confident Vanessa because on all three of our East Coast tour dates I was crowned the 30 Second Champion.

Vanessa: Yeah I don’t know what happened there.

Casper: I feel like maybe in person what I do really translates better than just through people’s ears.

Vanessa: I was very proud of you the entire tour.

Casper: Thank you. Thanks

Vanessa: So Casper, I would like to start where I often like to start which is, what the heck is wrong with Snape? He is like, “kids, shut up, all I have to do is call the Dementors when we get out of the willow. They’ll be pleased to see you Black, pleased enough to give you a little kiss I daresay.” Then, just for good measure, he says, “And Lupin maybe the Dementors are going to
be excited to see you as a werewolf.” Worst thing of all, he called Hermione, “stupid girl,” and tells her to, “shut up.” He is not even interested in the real information and he is not looking to extol any mercy. He’s just looking to wreak havoc and revenge for a prank that it sounds like didn’t even really happen. What are your thoughts on this?

Casper: I mean obviously he’s wrong, but from his perspective, I don’t know if I would act so differently right? Someone who I’ve really despised for a long time and who bullied me; has been helped in by someone who I haven’t trusted since the beginning—he’s always been weary of Lupin. And now here I’m catching them both with three of my least favorite students, and justice needs to be done and I’m going to maybe enjoy catching the wrongdoers a little bit. Obviously it’s not what he should do, but I understand why.

Vanessa: Yes, so I wonder if what he’s looking for is some sort of sense of justice, rather than a sense of mercy.

Casper: You could say he’s like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son, where he’s like, “I’ve done everything right, except be a death eater for a little while—but since then I’ve done everything right and I’ve followed all the rules and here’s Sirius who reeked havoc and Lupin who’s a werewolf, why’s he allowed to be back and so embraced by Dumbledore?” He’s resentful of the way that Lupin is being treated and how he’s loved by his students, when he’s been standing there the whole time. Like you can make that comparison.

Vanessa: Yes, you can make that comparison; I like that comparison of Snape to the older son in the parable. However, you would think that that moment in which he was a Death Eater would give him a greater sense of empathy and a sense of mercy. I honestly get excited when you make a mistake because I’m like, “oh that creates more room for me to mess up one day.” Because I make mistakes too and if you’re not perfect that gives me room to forgive myself when I make a mistake. And so I just feel like Snape could be like, “okay now I get to forgive myself for the fact that I was a Death Eater. I get to give out this mercy and want people to forgive me too.” It could give him the social capital to really be forgiven.

Casper: I love that. This is all revealing that Snape hasn’t really forgiving himself, which we know of course, that’s going to become more and more obvious later in the books, but his unwillingness to integrate his different experiences in life and own up to what he did wrong and to heal from that experience in his own way means that he’s acting in a way like he’s fourteen too, he hasn’t really matured. It’s really stunted his ability to show mercy, for example.

Vanessa: I’m not defending Snape, but I do wonder to what extent the fact that he has to remain this possible double agent keeps him from integrating all of his different identities…

Casper: Yes.
Vanessa: Because something that our mentor, Stephanie Paulsel, has said is that, “the best way to live your life is as if it is all one life. You don’t have a work self and a personal self, but you have a self that you’re comfortable with, that you feel as though you can bring to any space.” And Snape, to some extent, isn’t afforded that opportunity because he has to be able to maintain this Death Eater, undercover bit. But I still just think that this would be an amazing opportunity for him to solidify his Hogwarts identity a little bit, to make room for him to forgive himself, and bestow some mercy upon himself. Particularly because everybody in this room is really dealing with the ways that they have betrayed Lily and James and Snape is someone who has betrayed Lily and is spending his entire life trying to make up for it. This could be an opportunity for him to bond with these other people.

Casper: Oh my god I have so many thoughts. Okay so one: it’s really interesting that this idea that Snape is being kept in this duel identity that he can’t integrate, in the way that you said, by Dumbledore and I think if we want to go with the queer Dumbledore story, there’s someone who is living two lives who is now making Snape live two lives. You know, at the very top of this pyramid there’s someone who’s living a divided life so I think that is a really interesting thought.

Vanessa: That is really interesting. We tend to impose our own problems on somebody else, even inadvertently just because it’s the way we see the world.

Casper: Exactly.

Vanessa: It’s like, “oh we all have to live double lives, go ahead Snape.”

Casper: Exactly, exactly. And then secondly: I love this idea that everyone in that room is dealing with Lily and James and how they betrayed them. And I think we’ve been using this word mercy and forgiveness kind of interchangeably, and what you’ve helped me think of is I think we can forgive ourselves but mercy can only be bestowed by others, maybe. And so everyone in that room feels like they’ve failed Lily and James, but there’s no one who can grant mercy except for Harry and that’s what he’s going to do in this chapter, but to the most unlikely recipient.

Vanessa: I love the idea that forgiveness is something we can do to ourselves, but mercy is an external, relational thing. And that to some extent, you need the right people to literally be alive in order to be granted mercy. Sometimes mercy cannot be granted just because the chips have fallen and these people are no longer accessible to us. Except, I also love the idea that Harry, to a large extent, has suffered just as much as Lily and James and so he can bestow mercy on their behalf.

Casper: Yeah, because later in the chapter when he is merciful to Pettigrew, Sirius says, “you’re the only one who’s allowed to do that.” It seems like Harry has some authority to grant mercy.
Vanessa: Absolutely, Sirius, at minimum, grants him that authority. I just also love the idea theologically that ghosts can’t grant mercy, and I think the reason that I like that is something in a lot of god-based forgiveness theology that bothers me is that it doesn’t account for people who have just suffered until they have died. A lot of theology skirts around those things by saying, “God works in mysterious ways. Those people are in heaven now, they’re better off.” And that is the theological move that keeps me an atheist. And I’m just trying to parse out how I feel about the fact that Harry is allowed to grant mercy and I think that it’s a lesser mercy that Harry can grant then the mercy that would have been accessible to Lily forgiving Snape; and by forgiving Snape, granting full mercy upon Snape.

Casper: So I think this is the bit that we always talk about because I think this is where we land differently in terms of how we think about what God might be. I was thinking about mercy, especially this morning, thorough in Islam mercy is one of the most important words and there’s this beautiful tradition of reciting the 99 names of God and so many are to do with mercy, it’s God the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful, the Compassionate, the Loving, the Bestower. So I think, especially for Muslims, you can nearly equate God with mercy itself, and that is really appealing to me in the sense that, in the situation that you described where there are people who have suffered and victims are not there to grant mercy that in some way what we call God might be a break in that chain of suffering that offers mercy so that we don’t have to continue that cycle of violence. That’s the thing that counterbalances that cycle.

Vanessa: Yeah and I think that’s where my Jewish upbringing really comes to the fore, because in Judaism the only way to get mercy is through action. There’s the famous idea of the Tikkun Olam, which is the idea to heal the world. And it’s a story in the Talmud that the world gets broken into infinite pieces and that it’s each of our responsibilities to try to mend those pieces and that there are a lot of ways to mend those pieces. In fact, by falling in love with somebody you help heal the world. And that through acts of mercy you help heal the world, and the idea is that even just by marrying someone you’re helping to heal them because you’re bringing them a benevolent listener and partner.

Casper: Ideally.

Vanessa: In theory. So I think that this is just my Judaism presenting itself in terms of how I look at mercy. That mercy is only granted through action. And we see, I mean Harry is sort of a Jew in this moment, right? He’s like, “I don’t know whether or not god is going to forgive you all, that’s not up to me, but Peter Pettigrew I will act mercifully.” But what is so interesting is that Harry sees himself as bestowing mercy upon Lupin and Sirius.

Casper: Yes, it’s not actually about Peter, because he says, “James wouldn’t want you to become murderers.” That’s such an interesting idea for me.

Vanessa: But I love that idea because by granting mercy to one person, you’re actually granting mercy to everyone, right? He is saying, “I’m trying to live up to my mother’s and father’s
memories and he would want to absolve you, Sirius, he would want to grant mercy upon you and so don’t become the murderer that you never were. And by Harry bestowing that mercy upon Sirius, mercy is bestowed upon Pettigrew. And I think that one of the big lessons that I have learned throughout doing this podcast is that: one—intention moves the same thing on and on in this iterative way. I mean Dumbledore having to live a double life means that he’s making Snape live a double life. Harry really believing that James would entirely grant mercy upon Lupin and Sirius creates mercy for Pettigrew. Whatever intention we bring to a situation I think just becomes a snowball and so it invigorates me to really try to bring good intentions to things because those intentions just grow exponentially.

Casper: Yeah, just like, “hurt people, hurt people,” and I think you said this in the first chapter is that mercy begets mercy, that’s so true.

Vanessa: But you know me, I forget things that I say and then I have to learn them 800 times before I learn them.

Casper: I think we’re all in the same boat.

Vanessa: But I just want to take a second here to separate what mercy and forgiveness is, and this is only going to get us a tenth of the way there, but I think what Harry is imaging in granting mercy to Pettigrew, Sirius, and Lupin in this entangled way is that James would say to Sirius, “there’s nothing to forgive,” right? You’ve done nothing wrong, you made a strategic error out of wanting to protect us and so I grant mercy upon you. I withhold all judgment, there’s no act of retribution that I desire or that I will do, there’s no resentment, there’s no residual negativity there’s just gratitude for your good intentions. That doesn’t take us the whole way there between the difference between forgiveness and mercy because I think often we grant mercy when there is an action to forgive, a sort of sin, to forgive. But I think that that might be what Harry is saying in this moment, right? James wouldn’t even see that you’ve done anything that needs forgiveness, let’s just start handing out mercy. What do you think the difference between forgiveness and mercy is? Or is there somewhere else in the text that will help us separate those two more?

Casper: It’s such an interesting question and I think a place where we see forgiveness is for so many years Lupin had thought that Sirius was the spy who killed everyone and who shared the secret of where the Potters’ were. And we’ve see in the previous chapter that Lupin’s like, “oh my god, I’m so sorry,” and very quickly realizes what he’s done but we also in this chapter learn that Sirius thought that Lupin was the spy, that’s why he asked Pettigrew to be the secret keeper. And there’s this beautiful moment where they both realize that they suspected each other and again there’s this very quick moment of forgiveness. Lupin says, “will you forgive me?” and “Yes, Yes I will.” So I think that’s an example of forgiveness where it’s about a motive piece and mercy seems to really be about the actions that are involved. We’re not going to kill Pettigrew; we’re going to send him to Azkaban. No one is forgiving him for what he has done,
but Harry is giving him mercy, he’s saying, “I don’t want you to be killed, but I do want you to suffer,” very clearly he’s like, “you deserve it.” I think that’s maybe the difference that I see.

Vanessa: I agree and just like you can withhold forgiveness and yet enact mercy, you can withhold mercy but enact forgiveness, which is something that we’ve talked about before on the podcast—just like in the Emmanuel Church shooting that had happened, this is a group of people who testified very shortly after the shooting saying, “I forgive you but the state is still pressing charges.” Mercy is not being granted.

Casper: Right, and you see Pettigrew is not asking for forgiveness, he’s asking for mercy. I mean the word itself shows up in the chapter, he says, “James wouldn’t have wanted me killed, James would have understood. Harry he would have shown me mercy.” Which is so striking.

Vanessa: And so manipulative.

Casper: Oh he goes around everyone, this I thought was masterful, I mean I’m amazed how Pettigrew ended up in Gryffindor because he says to Ron, “oh you were such a good master,” he’s appealing to Ron’s inner need to be glorious and powerful. Then he says to Hermione, “oh you clever girl,” and then he says to Harry, “you dad…..” So he knows exactly what buttons to press.

Vanessa: Not only is it a wonder that he ever got into Gryffindor, I also wonder to the point of mercy begets mercy and one emotion just continuing in this exponential way—it seems to me that Sirius, Lupin, and James let Pettigrew into their friend group out of a sense of pity, right? He was always the follower. He was always the one that needed extra help. And Sirius even says to Pettigrew, “you were a hanger-on,” right? And I wonder if they never respected Pettigrew and that is part of why he was so willing to go over to Voldemort and was constantly willing to place himself in whatever group would protect him at any given time. They were really friends with him out of pity which reinforces the idea that he wasn’t deserving of good friends, I’m not saying that they were wrong to be kind to him all those years ago, I’m just saying that inauthentic relationships also have their downfalls. It’s one thing to be nice to someone who you don’t really want to be friends with, but I wonder if they went too far and Pettigrew always saw himself as someone who just had to be the least-liked person in a group. Basically I’m saying, Casper, I’ve been friends with you out of pity this whole time, and I think it might turn you into a murderer one day and so we should stop.

Casper: (in a raspy voice) I don’t deny it. I mean you’re right that’s certainly how we see the relationship, especially between Sirius and Pettigrew in this chapter, but Sirius has had thirteen years of brooding about the betrayal that Peter enacted and so I wonder if at the time, you know when they were in like middle school, there were real friendships. And of course we’ll learn that Peter looked lovingly at James and was always a little bit jealous in the same way that we see Ron look at Harry sometimes, but my assumption is that the friendship was true and not a kind of mean girls situation where Sirius is like, “you can’t sit with us.”
Vanessa: No I think Sirius was like, “even though you’re not wearing pink, you can sit with us.” And I guess I’m advocating for more of a mean girls mentality where you have to be wearing pink.

Casper: Clear boundaries.

Vanessa: Yeah, I’m obviously not arguing for that and I really like your point that in hindsight there’s that spin to it, but that we’re all a little bit jealous of each other in friendships and if you catch any of us on a bad memory we’re looking at each other and are like…

Casper: Ugh…

Vanessa: Except with you my love.

(Sacred Reading theme music plays)

Casper: Vanessa, it’s time for our spiritual practice and this week we’re doing Lectio Divina.

Vanessa: Oooooooo

Casper: And I need your help in finding the sentence, so I’m going to give you the pages in my U.K. paperback copy of this book, *Prisoner of Azkaban*, this chapter nineteen starts at page 263 and goes to 276, can you give me a number in between those two?

Vanessa: 275.

Casper: Oh okay so we’re looking at the back end, and a number between oh gosh maybe one and fourteen, I think there’s about fourteen paragraphs.

Vanessa: Thirteen.

Casper: Okay, this is the sentence:

“If anyone deserves that place, he does….”

Vanessa: That’s intense.

Casper: Okay so stage one is just thinking literally, what’s happening in this first reading just at a story level, where are we in the narrative?
Vanessa: Harry is saying that Pettigrew should not be killed, but that he should be taken to Azkaban and he is saying that if anybody deserves that terrible place that is Azkaban that it’s Peter Pettigrew.

Casper: Right and at this point, Harry should know because Hagrid has been there, and of course, Sirius has been there and he’s experienced Dementors himself. So it’s not a flippant comment, he knows a little bit about what suffering is there, yeah.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: Okay, so stage two, we’re now starting to think at an allegorical level. What other stories or images or, even, songs or poems, does this remind us of?

“If anyone deserves that place, he does….”

Vanessa: I mean it just reminds me of all of these moments after great injustices, like what do we do with the perpetrators of the crimes? So often those conversations are actually not about what is just or fair for the people on trial but who does society want to be after these traumas? Does society want to be executing people who executed, or does society want to be a place in which they rise about that? And I think we see different circumstances leading to all sorts of different conclusions, right? Italy dealt with Mussolini very differently than Germany decided to deal with high ranking SS Officers and I think that has to do with timing and it has to do with emotion and it has to do with all sorts or really complicated different things.

Casper: But also the judgment is being made by a thirteen-year-old boy.

Vanessa: But I often think that’s the case too, right? Where the judgment is being made by people who you wouldn’t necessarily suspect.

Casper: Well and in this case, the judgment is being made by someone who has been directly impacted by the crime.

Vanessa: Right, which isn’t the way we structure, at least in America, right? The survivors and victims don’t get to decide, it’s a jury of our peers who get to decide. What about you, what does it remind you of allegorically?

Casper: Hmmm…

“If anyone deserves that place, he does….”

This is a little bit weird but in the British Parliament there are two houses, there’s the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and the House of Commons is elected and the House of Lords is appointed. And if you’re one house, you can’t say the name of the other house; so if
you’re in the Commons, which is what you might see on TV with the green benches, you refer to the Lords as, “the other place.” Which, I don’t know, I’m just thinking of this language that Harry uses, “If anyone deserves that place,” there’s a thing about not saying the word Azkaban here, which is interesting to me. And it might be that he’s avoiding the real pain or what he knows will be there and he’s like, “I’m made this merciful decision, I don’t want to think about it anymore. Go, go and suffer,” because if I did put myself in your shoes, I would probably empathize with you because it is horrific.

Vanessa: And Harry, if we pull out a little bit, has just said, “He can go to Azkaban. If anyone deserves that place… “ But I wonder if throughout that sentence, he’s sort of processing and by the end of the sentence has processed the fact that maybe James wouldn’t even want his old friend to go to Azkaban, maybe James would have granted an even greater mercy, but he’s like, “I don’t care, okay, I’m not going to turn my dad’s friends into murderers, and I’m not going to kill you in the name of my dad, but I want you to go to that terrible place,” and is already feeling guilty that he’s not granting enough mercy. I do that all the time, where I like give a homeless person a dollar and as soon as I walk away I’m like, “I should have given them $5,” right? You feel like you’re being merciful and then by the end of the action you’re like, “that wasn’t enough mercy, why was I thinking that was generous at all?”

Casper: It brings me back to the father-figure in the prodigal son story where he’s not just giving a dollar, he’s not just welcoming the son home and saying, “yeah you asked to work in the stables, I will let you work in the stables as worker. I welcome you back fully into your whole personhood and here’s a ring on your finger and sandals on your feast and let’s a have a feast in your honor because you’re a son of mine.”

Vanessa: Right, true mercy is the full dignity, it’s like one of the opening scenes of Les Miserables where Jean Valjean steals from a bishop and the bishop doesn’t say, “oh I forgive you for stealing, no big deal,” he’s like, “take everything you stole and in fact, you didn’t take the candle sticks,” and then says to Jean Valjean, “I have bought your soul.” Like now you have to go be good. And it’s that merciful act creates Jean Valjean becoming this incredibly merciful person.

Casper: Vanessa…

Vanessa: I’m an incredibly cliché of myself, I’m like it starts with the Holocaust and ends with Les Mis. I only know three stories, so I’m just going to keep telling them

Casper: Okay so let’s move onto stage three, so at this point we want to reflect about what experiences in our own lives does this remind us of? So let me read the sentence again:

“If anyone deserves that place, he does....”
Vanessa: Yeah I think it’s making me think of those moments where I can help restore the full dignity of somebody else and moments in which it’s like not within my power to do so. Or at a minimum it feels as those, by restoring other peoples’ dignity I would be risking my own. And I mean that really comes down to like, helping somebody else out financially—I want to be able to do that, but then I get scared that if I give too much money to anybody, how am I going to live a dignified life in which I’m not begging from other people? What that line is, that’s something that I struggle with all the time. What about you Casper?

Casper: The thing that it reminds me of is we’ve read in a generous way that Harry’s being merciful, but this can also be really spiteful that there’s a real nasty edge to this sentence, and I think it reminds me of times when I feel vindictive, maybe. And this is still pretty much in the moment of Harry finding out that Pettigrew is responsible, right? All of the fear and the hate that Harry’s been directing at Sirius throughout this book, throughout his whole academic year, he’s now zeroing in on Pettigrew. I know that it takes me a couple of days to like calm down after I’ve been really annoyed by something or I’ve been wounded and I think Harry is definitely acting from that place of being hurt. It reminds me that I was reading some comments on Facebook today, someone didn’t realize they were writing about me and I was really offended by what they said, and I just wanted to let them have it and just be like, “you didn’t know I could see this but (mumbles).” So I get that impulse.

Vanessa: Well and I’m completely selfish in those moments, I feel like I call you or Ariana to process it and am like, “I can send this email right?” And you’re like, “no.” And then two days later I’m in that place so why do I even put that on you guys and why don’t I just wait two days?

Casper: But I think that so often we can’t do that, right? I’m so surprised that in the previous chapter, Harry says, “Sirius deserves worse than Azkaban, he deserves to die and I want to kill him.” And he really goes for it, right? He’s got the wand at his face and yet in this chapter it’s reversed and he’s saying, “Pettigrew shouldn’t die, we should be merciful, he should go to Azkaban.” And I wonder if that has to do with the fact that Harry couldn’t kill Sirius, he tried, and his mind wanted to but his body wouldn’t let him in some way. I just think that’s really interesting. So the final stage of Lectio is when we try and ask, what has the text invited us to do? Traditionally it would be, what is God saying through this text? So I’ll read it one last time:

“If anyone deserves that place, he does….”

Vanessa: I mean I just can’t help think about the fact that Harry is right to want to lock up Pettigrew because Pettigrew gets freed, which is what allows Voldemort to rise again. And I’m not sure I know what to do with that, it’s like mercy has a time and a place and sometimes we have to contain things in order to prevent evil from begetting evil. I know this is really abstract, but I feel called to think through justice more. I think the brilliant moment in that scene in Les Mis is that the priest then says to Jean Valjean, “I’ve bought your soul.” He doesn’t say, “Okay, stealing isn’t a problem, go next door and keep stealing.” And so I’m not sure what to do with it, I just feel called to think through mercy even more. Maybe just like we can keep thinking
through the theme of mercy every two chapters, because I super haven’t figured it out. What about you Casper, what do you feel called to?

Casper: One piece of the puzzle that I feel like we haven’t really understood fully is Peter’s full story. We get glimpses of him from other people’s perspective but he’s still kind of a 2D character, he’s pretty flat, I guess I feel like this happens every time we do Lectio but I feel called to learn more about people’s stories before I judge them. Yeah, so maybe that person on Facebook had a legitimate reason before they infuriated me.

Vanessa: Probably not though.

Casper: Probably not, I agree. Today’s voicemail is from Blair, who’s taking us back to Chapter 11: The Firebolt.

(Beep)

Blair: Hi Casper, Hi Vanessa, Hi Ariana, this is Blair from Sacramento and I’m calling about the chapter on duty, specifically when your talking about Sirius sending Harry the Firebolt. So while I do agree with you that there probably is a sense of duty, I’m a Godmother to one of my nieces and I do feel this sense of duty to want to be a good Godmother and uphold the sanctity of what that means, however I absolutely think that Sirius loves Harry because we can’t forget that Harry was a year old when Voldemort killed his parents. We even see in Book Seven in the letter that Lily writes to Bathilda that the broomstick that Sirius gave him for his first birthday was his favorite toy and he includes a picture of Harry zooming a couple of feet off the group. So this is a relationship that has been fostered for a year and if you’ve ever been around a child for any amount of time that has a good relationship with you or something bound like being a Godfather, there is so much love, you cannot help but love that child. So I think that there’s probably a very deep sense of love there, and longing that he missed all of this time and wanting to do whatever he can to bridge the twelve years that he did not get to spend with Harry. So that was just my thoughts of love and duty don’t have to necessarily be mutually exclusive.

Casper: Blair, oh my god, your voicemail just connected two things for me which I’m really excited about which is Sirius sends him a little baby broom for Harry to play with and it’s Harry’s favorite toy and then much later he sends him an actual broom and I had just never seen those connections.

Vanessa: And it’s his favorite toy.

Casper: Exactly all those years later.

Vanessa: Yeah, thirteen isn’t too old to have a favorite toy.
Casper: No!

Vanessa: I'm 35 and I have favorite toys.

Casper: No further questions.

Vanessa: So Casper now is the time in which we offer blessings, whom would you like to bless this week?

Casper: My blessing is for Ron, we haven't really talked about him in this chapter, but he has a presence throughout this scene, of course. And he has been responsible for Pettigrew, he has been keeping him alive in many ways and has been feeding him and looking after him. And he takes on this responsibility even though he has a broken leg, but he volunteers to be chained next to Pettigrew, so Pettigrew can't escape. And I feel like it's this beautiful instance of Ron taking responsibility for something that he didn't intend, but was part of, and I think that we often talk about Ron as someone, his reaction to Lupin being a werewolf for example, as a metaphor for discrimination and nastiness in so many ways, and yet here's Ron taking on a responsibility in a way that he didn't need to. He's got a broke leg, who would ask him to walk next to someone, but I don't know, there was something poetic that doesn't necessarily redeem him but illustrates that Ron also wants to do the right thing even if he doesn't always.

Vanessa: Amen.

Casper: How about you?

Vanessa: So Hermione is the only woman in this chapter, but it is a pleasure to bless her, and I'm going to bless her for the way that she speaks to Sirius. She still very much thinks that Sirius is guilty, but she says, “Uh Mr. Black, Sirius...” And Sirius gets taken off guard because he's being spoken to with so much respect and dignity. And as we're trying to figure out this idea between granting mercy on someone but wanting to prevent them from maybe continuing negative actions, the way that we see Pettigrew do, I think that Hermione points us in one good direction which is that even if we can't, for whatever reason, grant someone mercy that doesn't mean that we can't treat them with dignity. So I want to bless Hermione for pointing us in that direction.

Casper: That's beautiful.

(Outro Music Begins)

Casper: You've been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. Remember to join Vanessa and Ariana in Chicago; and follow us on Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Facebook or leave us a review on iTunes. We'd love to hear from you in a voicemail, please send us a blessing for one
of the characters. And we’ll see you next week when we read Chapter 20: The Dementor’s Kiss through the theme of justice.

Vanessa: This episode was produced by Arianna Nedelman, Casper ter Kuile, and me, Vanessa Zoltan. Our music is by Ivan Pyzow and Nick Bohl. And we are proud to be part of the Panoply Network. You can find ours and other great shows on panoply.fm. This week’s voicemail is thanks to Blair and we would also like to thank Rebecca and Charlie Ledley, and Stephanie Paulsel.

Casper: Bye

(Outro Music Ends)

Casper: I watched Magic Mike yesterday and it was so disappointing.

Vanessa: Oh I disagree.

Casper: It was such a bad movie.

Vanessa: Oh my god, you’re crazy.

Casper: Magic Mike 2 apparently is supposed to be good? But Magic Mike was bad.

Vanessa: No, both of them are brilliant films.

Final Music: Panoply