

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Church people:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to morning prayers at the Memorial Church. I invite you please, to rise for our responsorial song, which is number 81 in your black Psalter. Sing aloud unto God our strength. Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.

Congregation:

Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Blow up the trumpets in the new moon in the time appointed on our solemn feast day.

Congregation:

For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Thou callest in trouble, and I delivered thee. I answered thee in the secret place of thunder. I approved thee at the waters of Meribah.

Congregation:

Hear, oh my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

There shall no strange God be in thee, neither shalt thou worship any strange God.

Congregation:

I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.

Choir:

(singing).

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 19th chapter of the gospel of Matthew beginning at the 27th verse. Peter said to Jesus, "Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, I tell you at the renewal of all things, when the son of man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel and everyone who

has left houses or brothers or sisters or mother or children or fields for my name's sake, will receive a hundred fold and will inherit eternal life." Here ended the lesson.

Today is the feast day of the medieval Saint Hugh of Lincoln. I don't want to talk about Hugh. So we're going to talk about tomorrow's saint, who is Hilda of Whitby, one of the most important English Christians. Hild, she was known in her own day. She was born in 614, lived until 680. Her father was the brother of the king of Northumbria. Northumbria was a kingdom in what is now Southern Scotland in Northern England. Her father was poisoned. And so she had lived, she was sent to her uncle's court and she was raised in the Northumbrian court.

They were not Christians. The Northumbrians were not Christians. Her uncle Edwin married Æthelfrith, who was a Christian princess from Kent. And two years later, the whole court was baptized, including Hild. In 633, the kingdom of Northumbria was conquered by Mercia, a non-Christian kingdom. Edwin was killed and the queen and Hild and others fled down to Kent, where the queen started an abbey. Kent had been recently evangelized by Rome. And so there were actually two versions of Christianity operating in Britain at the time. In the south, Roman Christianity, in the north Celtic Christianity. The northern Bishop, Aidan, called Hild back to Northumbria to start an abbey. She went back there, to Northumbria, started one abbey, led another, and then started the very famous third abbey at Whitby in the Celtic fashion.

So in the Celtic abbeys, it was both men and women, so she governed men and women. They lived in small huts of two or three, men on one side, women on another side, and there was a chapel in the middle, and all of it governed by Hild.

A big argument erupted in the church, as it always does, between the Roman and the Celtic practice. And a synod was held at Whitby, which Hild administered, and they came to an agreement to follow the Roman practice. And I think it was something about Hild's existence in both those worlds. The fact that she was from the north, led a monastery in the north following the Celtic practice, but also had connections to the Southern Christian Roman rite. And she was able to do this and administer this peace.

She was the counselor of Kings that came to her for council. She was one of the most important Christians of her day, and I wish we had some of her writings. I teach an introduction to ministry class at the divinity school, and I wanted to know what she wrote about. She lived in this time of great turmoil. I wanted to know what her experience was like, leading this community at this turbulent time, and we have none of that.

We have legends of her life, which is recorded by the Venerable Bede. The only writing we have that came directly out of the abbey is one nine line poem by a shepherd named Cædmon. It's the first poem in English that we have. Nine lines. And Cædmon was just the boy who worked in the stables and took care of the animals. But Hild noticed him, noticed his gift for song, and invited him to cultivate this gift of poetry. And that's what we have left of her ministry, these stories, and this nine line poem. That's what we have left, in writing, I should say. I want to have something of her own words, but what we do have

is the church, the English church. What we do have, is the long tradition of English poetry that Cædmon started.

I spoke about my own work as a teacher, and I think about my own work as a teacher. And as a teacher, your greatest success isn't what your students do, not what you do. And I think, as a pastor, that's also true. This abbey at Whitby produced five bishops and two saints, and Cædmon the poet, and the English church, and the tradition of English poetry. We don't have her words, but we have all these words made flesh, a witness to her work.

I don't love Jesus' answer to Peter's question in the gospel passage I just read, where Jesus says, "If you leave everything behind, don't worry, we'll replace it a hundred fold, later." On the one hand, we can see Hild as a fulfillment of this teaching. She left everything twice, left the north for the south, the south for the north. And didn't she, as Jesus promised, come into great renown?

I actually want to focus on the disciple's question, on Peter's question, actually. His sort of, what have you done you for me lately, inquiry to Jesus. We've left everything. What are you going to do for us now? I think, when we seek reward, we assume that our rewards, the rewards for our work, will redound to ourselves. But Hild's rewards redound to us. And the reward for Jesus' work redounds to us.

We have none of Hild's writings, none of many of the writings of the women who made the church. And for this, we ought to lament. But we do have the church, the church that they made. And this is their witness, and for it we give thanks for their words made flesh in our lives. I invite you please, to rise for the prayers.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And with thy spirit.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Oh, God of peace, by whose grace, the abbess, Hilda, was endowed with gifts of justice, prudence, and strength, to rule as a wise mother over the nuns and monks of her household. Raise up these gifts in us that we, following her example in prayers, may build up one another in love, to the benefits of your church, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit. One God now and forever. Amen.

And now, let us pray the words Jesus taught us saying, Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by 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.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please join in singing our concluding hymn, number 225.

Congregation:

(singing).

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all ever more. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.