

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Good morning. Welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for the responsive reading, Psalm 71 found in your black Appleton Psalter book. Please remain masked throughout the responsive reading.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

In thee, oh Lord, do I put my trust. Let me never be put to confusion. Deliver me... and cause me to escape. Incline thine ear unto me, and save me.

Congregation:

Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape. Incline thine ear unto me, and save me.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort. Thou hast given commandment to save me, for thou art my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, oh my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.

Congregation:

Deliver me, oh my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

For thou art my hope, oh Lord God. Thou art my trust from my youth. I am as a wonder unto many, but thou art my strong refuge.

Congregation:

I am as a wonder unto many, but thou art my strong refuge.

The Rev. Calvin Jones:

Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thine honor all the day. Cast me not off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength faileth.

Congregation:

Cast me not off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength faileth.

Congregation:

My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long: for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Mattheew I. Potts:

This is a reading from the Gospel According to Saint John. "I am the vine. You are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me, you can do nothing. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, and to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends because I've made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I choose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. Here endeth the lesson."

Today's the feast day in my church, communion. Today's the feast day of Catherine of Genoa. Catherine was born in the year 1447 in Genoa, Italy, to noble parents, to elite parents. Her father died when she was 16, and she was married at this relatively young age, probably to resolve a dispute between two noble families in Genoa at the time. And as you might guess, under such circumstances, it was sort of a miserable marriage.

For 10 years she prayed for illness, to receive a severe illness so she could be taken away from this marriage. She didn't receive that illness, but she did receive instead a mystical experience in the midst of confession. While sort of in the confessional booth with the priest, she had this mystical experience, and she got up and walked out, and at that point in her life, abandoned most public prayer practices. She didn't pray rosaries anymore. She rarely went to confession. But she said she was constantly at inward prayer, interior inspiration, she said. After a few years of this, she began serving the sick in Genoa, and her sort of rascal of a husband, Giuliano, also had a conversion and then joined her in this work. They lost all their money. They moved into the hospital, and lived at the hospital in Genoa, caring for the sick and spending all their time there. Catherine died 511 years ago today in the hospital where she gave her life to the poor and to the suffering.

The lesson that I just read from the Gospel of John is the lesson assigned for Catherine, and it's Jesus's farewell address to his friends. He called them his friends. And this is a very long passage in John. It's several chapters of the Gospel of John, Jesus's farewell address. And it's both tedious and poignant. Jesus is very repetitive. He says the same things over and over again. You can imagine, here's Jesus saying goodbye to his good friends, knowing what is to come and wanting to say what is important over and over and over to them. And he tells them again and again to love. Love one another. Love one another.

But here, this time he says it, in this farewell address, he has this one line. He says, "Bear fruit that will last." The same problem is... I don't know if it's a problem, but the same issue is at stake in, I think, what's going on with Catherine. She has this interior inspiration, right? How do we know that someone's loving? Jesus says, "Bear fruit that will last." He says, "Love one another." I think we tend to think about love as an interior feeling, but how do you know if someone has an interior feeling? You know it by what they do.

You can imagine Catherine's confessor when she walked out of that confessional, thinking, what is going on with this person, Catherine? How do we know that she's having an authentic, mystical experience?

We know because she bore fruit that will last. My daughter, Cami, was a few years younger than she is now. She sometimes would sneak downstairs early in the morning. She's an early riser, and she would sneak downstairs early in the morning after Halloween and Easter, when there was lots of candy in the house. And she would sneak candy first thing in the morning before we woke up. And we always knew this. She'd get up before us, but we always knew this because we'd open the garbage to throw our coffee grounds in or whatever, and there'd be a pile of candy wrappers on top of the garbage. And I never told her this, but my concern was not so much that she was stealing candy. My concern was that she was heading the evidence so poorly, a big pile of candy wrappers. Anticipate that we're going to see this, right?

I think Jesus is asking us to leave some evidence behind. Jesus is telling us, "Love deeply. Love with your whole heart. Love one another. This is how the world will know that you are my disciples," Jesus said. But how will the world know? If you bear fruit. That will last. Our temptation, I think, is to believe that faith is something that happens inside of us. But Jesus is telling us that faith is something we accomplish for and with and among others. And so this morning I ask, what fruits will your faith bear? Think of Catherine in this hospital. The Talmud has this beautiful line. "If you save one life, you save the whole world." Because think of the generations that will come from this one life.

Think of Catherine, all the people, she saved, all the people she tended 500 years ago in Genoa, all the lives, all the worlds that have come from her everyday acts of love. Which fruits will your faith bear? Which worlds will your everyday acts of love serve to save? Please rise for the prayers. The Lord be with you. Let us pray. Gracious God, reveal to thy church the depths of thy love, that like that servant Catherine of Genoa, we might give ourselves in loving service, knowing that we have been perfectly loved by thee. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen. And now we pray with the words Jesus taught us saying, 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. 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. Please join in singing hymn 21.

Congregation:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to him from generation to generation in the church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever. Amen. Let us bless the Lord.