

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to morning prayers at the Memorial Church. Our responsorial psalm for this morning is Psalm 108, Psalm 108 on page 54 in your black psalter. Please make the responses in bold, and please rise as you're able.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

My heart is firm, oh God. I will sing and chant to him with all my soul.

Congregation:

Awake, oh harp and lyre. I will wake the dawn.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

I will praise you among the peoples, oh Lord, sing hymn to you among the nations.

Congregation:

For your faithfulness is higher than the heavens. Your steadfastness reaches to the sky.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Exalt yourself over the heavens, oh God. Let your glory be over all the earth.

Congregation:

That those whom you love may be rescued, deliver with your right hand and answer me.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Grant us your aid against the foe. The help of man is worthless.

Congregation:

With God, we shall triumph. He will trample our foes.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the Gospel According to Matthew: As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to the disciples, "Why does your teacher

eat with with this tax collector and sinners?" But when Jesus heard this, he said, "Those who are well, have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners. Here endeth the lesson."

I think some of you know, my mom is from Japan, was born and raised in Osaka, Japan. And she married my dad who was born and raised as a white guy, born and raised in Saginaw and Kalamazoo, Michigan. And when my mom moved to this country, she wanted to give me an English name, but she didn't know what all the English names meant. In Japanese naming, there's all kinds of reasons why you might give someone a name, including even the number of brushstrokes in the character that you're writing. But she wanted to know what the names meant. And so she was looking through names. She wanted a biblical name. She saw the name Matthew. The name Matthew means gift of God. So she said, "That's the one." Today is not, in fact, the feast of Saint Matthew. Yesterday was, but it's close enough, and I'm Matthew, so we're talking about Matthew this morning.

What we have for our reading this morning is the traditional account of Matthew's calling, a tax collector who was called and then became an apostle. The sort of church story has it that eventually he went and he wrote this gospel. And then he went to Ethiopia as an apostle and then he was martyred there, his relics eventually translated to Salerno, Italy, where you can still, ostensibly, visit the remains of Matthew on the Mediterranean coast.

I must confess there are some discrepancies in this historical record, and not just about whether or not the body in Salerno actually belonged to Matthew. But even to whether the apostle wrote this gospel. Most scholars believe that he did not. But also whether this tax collector was the apostle. In Matthew's gospel, Matthew the tax collector is the one who becomes the apostle. But in the other gospels, there's an Apostle Matthew, and then another guy named Levi is the tax collector.

Jesus's calling of Matthew, the wording here is so simple. It's almost magical, right? He turns, and it says he sees Matthew and says two words, "Follow me." And Matthew stands and follows him. It sounds like magic. And you'd like to think that if Jesus walked by this Matthew or one of you, that there would be that magic, that grace of recognition that he would bestow upon you or upon me so that we would know to stand up and leave everything behind and follow him.

But we can also maybe read this another way. Matthew was surely miserable. Tax collectors were reviled by everyone. They were Judeans, they were Jewish, but they were hired by the Romans to collect taxes. They were paid no salary, so they earned only what extra they charged when they paid taxes. And they charged that extra with the full force of Roman occupation. The Romans didn't like them, their own countrymen, the Judeans, did not like them. Matthew was surely miserable. But then Jesus looks by and the gospel tells us, walks by, and the gospel tells us, "Jesus saw him." Now the Greek word used here for to see is the same word for behold. Jesus beheld him. He saw right into him. He was noticed in a way that all the people around him who reviled him and ignored him never noticed him. And it's in being seen that Matthew was given the courage, the strength, the wisdom to stand up and follow him.

Then if you look at the Gospel of Matthew, whoever wrote it, the unique stuff that happens in Matthew and not the other gospels, there are the wise men who come from far and notice this child against all

odds, who behold this child. There is the Centurion at the foot of the cross who participates in Jesus's crucifixion. And yet is the first one who proclaims in that moment, "Truly this one is the Son of God," who beholds him. There's Pilate's wife, another unexpected person noticing this Jesus, having a dream about this man. And then there are the Beatitudes, again, unique to Matthew, all about calling us to notice those who are forgotten, those who are outcast, those who are reviled, those who are ignored.

It might not be true that the writer of this gospel and this are reviled and ignored tax collector are the same man. It might not be true, but it ought to be. What does it mean as this gospel calls us to, to love your enemy, to see your enemy, to behold your enemy, and in so doing, see what their mother sees a gift from God? Or indeed, what their heavenly father sees, a gift? Who else but a person like this tax collector, so reviled and ignored, could so graciously invite us, his readers, to give our attention to the most reviled and to the most ignored?

But if this is true of Matthew, then of course, it is also true of Jesus. This one reviled by nearly everyone on the cross, this one ignored and forgotten by nearly everyone on the cross, even by his friends, even by this Matthew, whom he called. Who else but this Jesus, this reviled and ignored one, whose voice echoes to us still from that cross through the ages, "Follow me"?

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please rise for the prayers. The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And with thy spirit.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. We thank you, heavenly Father for the witness of your apostle and evangelist Matthew, to the gospel of your Son, our Savior. And we pray that after his example, we may with ready wills and hearts obey the calling of our Lord to follow him through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And now we pray 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. 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.

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 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.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please join in singing our closing hymn, hymn 225.

Congregation:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and remain with you evermore. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.