

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to morning prayers at the Memorial Church. I invite you please to rise for our responsorial Psalm, which is number 39 in your psalter. "I said, I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue. I will keep a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence."

Congregation:

I was silent and still; I held my peace to no avail; my distress grew worse.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"My heart became hot within me. While I mused the fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue."

Congregation:

"Lord let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight. Surely everyone stands as a mere breath."

Congregation:

Surely everyone goes about like a shadow. Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; they heap up, and do not know who will gather.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry to you. Do not hold your peace at my tears."

Congregation:

For I am your passing guest, and alien, liken all my forebears.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Turn your gaze away from me that I may smile again before I depart and am no more.

Choir:

(Singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 11th chapter of the gospel according to St. Matthew beginning at the second verse. "When John heard in prison, what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples. And so said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and what you see. The blind receive their sight. The lame walk. The lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. And the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.'"

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John. "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal places. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written. See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. Truly, I tell you among those born of women, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist. Yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he here." Endeth of the lesson.

Yesterday, friends, in my church we celebrated remembered the Saint Bridget of Sweden. As far as I can tell, we don't remember anybody today. So there are days available if you're looking to make a name for yourself. Bridget was a 14th century Swedish mystic, visionary, and nun. She was the daughter of a wealthy landowner. Starting at around age 10, she began having visions of Jesus on the cross. Over time, she later also began having visions of Jesus in his manger. Many of our contemporary versions, representations, of Jesus in the manger with the holy family are based upon the visions that Bridget had in the 14th century. They were later translated into Latin, called the Celestial Revelations. It became very popular in the 14th century.

Bridget was married at 14. She had eight children, six of whom survived to adulthood, which was a good rate at that time. Her husband died when she was 31, and she started a new Order, the Order of the Most Holy Savior, which is today known as the Bridgettines, after Bridget. One of the distinctive years of this Order was that it was a double monastery with both monks and nuns living in adjacent houses and an abyss, a woman in charge of everybody, which again was unique for the time to have men be ruled by a woman.

All surplus income at the Order went to the poor, except they're to have as many books as they wanted, which seems a nice for rule, also. She went to Rome in 1350, became beloved and popular there because of her visions and her good works, and never returned to Sweden.

When I was reading about Bridget one detail about her life really stood out to me. The author of this little biography or hagiography I was reading said that she had eight children, six of whom survived, as I said, which meant she was considered lucky by the standards of the day. And it just sort of broke my heart to imagine two of your children dying, and being considered lucky.

Bridget lived through one of the most tumultuous times in human history. In the middle of the 14th century, there was turmoil in Europe everywhere. There was a plague. We know something about plagues, but not what they knew, a plague that wiped out a third of the European population. There was political unrest throughout Europe. The two major powers, England and France, fought the Hundred Years' War. There was a massive famine at the beginning of the century, which they think maybe knocked out another fifth or quarter of the European population. There was an ice age. It's called the Little Ice Age. There was a massive earthquake in Northern Italy that was felt throughout Europe. There was the great Western schism, two popes, for most of the 14th century.

Most people believed it was the end of the world. They had good reason to believe it because all around them their worlds were ending. So what did Bridget do? In the face of all this, all this

catastrophe, what did she do? She prayed. She studied. She built a community. She performs acts of kindness and good works. All wise moves, I think. Probably didn't hurt that she put a woman in charge.

I don't want to oversimplify or trivialize these catastrophes for a family that was wiped out or for a person starving at that time. All these good works in prayers probably were of limited use. And it's easy 700 years later to look back upon Bridget and say, "Oh, good for her. She prayed. And she studied. And she did good works." And I don't mean to suggest that these problems, which are unsettlingly familiar, pandemic, political unrest, famine, climate change, all things we know and are coming to know better than we would like to. I don't mean to suggest that these things could be so simply solved by prayer, study, good works, gathering in community. But it sure wouldn't hurt.

If we did all those things, if we really committed together to doing all these things, not only would we have the benefit of those acts, but we might also discern some new and more revolutionary ways of moving forward together.

I invite you please to rise for the prayers. The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. O, God who beholdest all things and whose judgment is always mercy, by the example of thy servant, Bridget of Sweden, give to us in this life the vision of thy kingdom where Jesus Christ is all and in all, that we may pattern our earthly lives on things heavenly, where our lives are hid. Put the same Christ in me with whom and the Holy Ghost liveth and reignest forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And now let us pray together 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 day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespass 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." Please join in singing our concluding hymn, number 208.

Congregation:

(Singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all this day and always. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

This transcript was exported on Oct 18, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God. (music)