

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

(music) 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 number 61. "Hear my cry, O God. Attend unto my prayer."

Congregation:

From the end of the earth I will cry unto thee; when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"For thou has been a shelter for me and a strong tower from the enemy."

Congregation:

I will abide thy tabernacle for ever; I will trust in the covert of thy wings.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"For thou, O God, hast heard my vows. Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name."

Congregation:

Thou will prolong the king's life; I will trust in the covert of thy wings.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"He shall abide before God forever. O, prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him.

Congregation:

Si will I sign praise unto thy name for ever; that I may daily perform my vows..

Choir:

(Singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 16th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, beginning at the 31st verse. Jesus said to his disciples, "Do you now believe the hour is coming, indeed, it has come, when you will be scattered each one to his home, and you will leave me alone? Yet, I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution, but take courage. I have conquered the world." Here endeth the lesson.

The Church of England, the mother church of the Anglican Communion, to which I belong, today commemorates Edith Cavell, a martyr of the early 20th century. She was born the 4th of December, 1865, in Norwich, England. Her father was a cleric. She served as a governess, first in England, and then went to Belgium and worked there as a governess, then returned to England to care for her father as he died. That experience caring for him led her to become a nurse, and a good one.

In 1907, she was recruited to become head of a nursing school in Brussels on the continent. Not long thereafter, war broke out. And in November of 1914, after the Germans had occupied Belgium, she sheltered French and British soldiers in her home, and also sheltered Belgium and French civilians of military age. And she smuggled them, funneled them into the Netherlands, which was neutral at the time. She got them to safety, in effect.

And she was outspoken about her work. She didn't hide it from the Germans, even though it was against the Marshall Law that the German military had imposed upon Belgium. She said quite openly, "I can't stop my work while there are lives yet to be saved." In August of 1915, she was arrested and she readily confessed to harboring and smuggling 60 British and 15 French soldiers, and to smuggling and giving cover to 100 Belgian and French civilians.

At her trial by court martial, she signed a statement of guilt without any qualification. And on the eve of her execution, she said, "Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness toward anyone."

On October 12th, 106 years ago today, she was killed by firing squad. Her memory was celebrated by the allies. Movies were made about her, and her legacy lived on. When Hitler occupied Paris in World War II, he destroyed two memorials in the city. And one of the ones he destroyed was the stone memorial to Edith Cavell.

What's remarkable about Cavell, I think, and maybe what we can take from her example, is the ever-widening circle of her concern. That statement "I can't stop while there are lives still to be saved." She went home to take care of her father, but the circle of that care widened, and she became a nurse to care for others who were sick and dying. She loved her neighbor in Brussels, and that love for her neighbor meant that she had to love those who were trying to flee from war and conscription.

She loved her allies, those who were trying to flee from war, and that love led her to try her best to love her enemy, as she said on the eve of her execution, "I can have no hatred or bitterness to anyone." This commitment to ever widening circles of affection and care and loyalty is so different from the nationalisms that cause the First World War, the nationalisms that haunt us still in our world, in our country.

Jesus, too, in the Gospel passage today, is speaking on the eve of his execution and he's talking to his friends. And that last line of his didn't sit well with me when I first read it. "But take courage," he says, "I have conquered the world."

The Greek word for conquest here is *nike*, like the shoe. It means victory more than conquest. It has the sense of arriving as a victor more than vanquishing one's foes. And so we can ameliorate maybe the harshness of that line, "conquering the world," when we consider it in its Greek context. But there's also the context of the Gospel of John. This line, "I have conquered the world," abstracted from the rest of the Gospel loses something of the meaning of what Jesus is talking about. Because elsewhere in the Gospel of John, in fact, elsewhere in this same speech, and over and over again in the Gospel, Jesus says, "I have not come to condemn the world, but to love it." The great courage of Jesus, the great courage of Edith, was their knowledge and their faith that victory comes through love. Even if love comes with death. I invite you please to rise for the prayers. The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Living God, the source of all healing and wholeness. We bless you for the compassionate witness of your servant, Edith Cavell. Inspire us to be agents of peace and reconciliation in a world beset by injustice, poverty and war. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God to the ages of ages. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And let us pray now 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." Please join in singing our concluding hymn, number 47. (music)

Congregation:

(Singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

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

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.