

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to morning prayers, here in the Appleton Chapel of the Memorial Church. I invite you, please, to rise for our responsorial reading this morning, which is Psalm six, in your black psalter.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Oh Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.

Congregation:

Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O Lord, how long?

Congregation:

Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?

Congregation:

I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies.

Congregation:

Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

The Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer.

Congregation:

Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return and be ashamed suddenly.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 14th chapter of the gospel according to St. John, beginning at the 7th verse.

When Jesus noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host. And the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place.' And then in disgrace, you would start to take the lowest place.

"But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

He said also to the one who had invited him to dinner, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends, or your brothers, or your relatives, or your rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Here endeth the lesson.

Today, of course, is Ash Wednesday. And at our noon service today, we will observe Ash Wednesday with imposition of ashes. Also, tonight, at our 8:00 PM student communion service, we will have imposition of ashes. And if you would like to have ashes imposed, I invite you, please, to return for one of those services.

When March 2nd is not Ash Wednesday, it is the feast of Saint Chad. And Chad actually, I think, teaches us something about Lent, about this Lent, and about this lesson. And so, as we briefly postpone our observance of Ash Wednesday until noon, I'd like to tell you about Chad.

Chad was a saint of the mid 7th century from Northumbria. Northumbria was a kingdom in Southeastern Scotland in Northern England, an Anglo-Saxon kingdom. His own name, Chad, is British. And so, he represents something of the merger of these two cultures, the British Celtic culture and the Anglo-Saxon culture.

Some of you who are faithful morning prayer attendees will remember, I preached on Hilda, several weeks ago. This was right about the time of Hilda, when these two cultures were merging, and there was lots of conflict in the church, over whether to practice the Celtic traditions or the Roman traditions. Chad was a monk, but not of the Benedictine variety. He was a Peripatetic monk, he wandered around and studied the Bible. That was his rule. He, and three of his brothers, founded a monastery, at Lastingham. His brother, Cedd, was the abbot. When Cedd died, Chad was made the abbot. The king of

Northumbria appointed a person who followed the Roman rite, to become Archbishop of York. But plague was everywhere in those days. There were not enough bishops to consecrate this man, Archbishop of York. So he went to France to find some bishops. And he took a long time, and the king got impatient, as the king turned to Chad and said, "Chad, you become Archbishop, because we can't wait any longer."

Chad went and found bishops in Southern England, some following the Roman rite, some following the Celtic British rite, and they consecrated him. And he came back, and started practicing as Archbishop of York, one of the senior bishops in all the land. And then finally, this Roman priest returned. And the king said to Chad, "Give up your post and retire." And Chad did.

This lesson we have from Jesus today, is not one I love, to be quite honest. It's sort of a strategic Miss Manners, isn't it? This is where you sit when you go to dinner. But also most worsenly, it's also sort of like, this is how you get the better reward. This is how you get people to notice you the right way. I don't have time this morning to parse that, maybe in a Sunday sermon sometime. But this thing that Jesus says, invite the poor, those who cannot repay you; that's what love looks like, doesn't it?

I think about my deepest loves. I think about when my children emerged into this world, and I didn't hold them in my hands and say, "Oh, look, here is one who can take care of me in my old age." I love them just because they were. And at that moment, in their extreme vulnerability, they could not repay me anything that I had to offer, and yet, I was willing to offer them anything and everything. Giving up heirs, putting away honor and prestige, as Jesus calls us to do, is really about loving our neighbor, because it is saying that, your presence here is the gift, not any honor you bestow me otherwise, just your presence.

Lent, which begins today, on Ash Wednesday, is a time of fasting, and I am making some fasts this Lent. Pretty typical ones, I have a sweet tooth. I'm giving up desserts. Trying to give up my phone. We'll see how that goes. But Chad, his example and Jesus today, ask us what it would mean to fast from distinctions, and honors, and exaltations. This is perhaps, an especially pointed challenge to us here at Harvard, for whom distinctions, and honors, and exaltations, are the waters in which we swim. They are the stones from which these marvelous buildings are made. And yet, pull all these buildings down, and Christ would rebuild them in three days, not with any competing or better honors and exaltations, but with a love so deep and so dear, it will endure even the excruciating humiliations of the cross.

Today is the first day of Lent. Today, Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem and bids us to follow. May we set out after him in humility and in faith.

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

Congregation:

And with thy spirit.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, whose son, our Lord Jesus Christ, took the form of a servant for the sake of his brothers and sisters, strengthen us with the prayers, in example of your servant, Chad, who became the least of all to minister to all. Through the same Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And let us pray now also, the words Jesus taught us. Saying-

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. Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Our concluding hymn is number 145.

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 God from generation to generation in the church, and to Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.