

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to the service of Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel of our Memorial Church in this holy week. I invite you please to rise to our responsorial Psalm, which is number 62. Please make the responses in bold. For God alone my soul waits in silence, from Him comes my salvation.

Congregation:

He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress, I shall not be greatly moved.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

For God alone my soul waits in silence for my hope is from Him.

Congregation:

He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress. I shall not be shaken.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

On God rests my deliverance, and my honor, my mighty rock, my refuge is God.

Congregation:

Trust in Him at all times, oh people, pour out your heart before him, God is a refuge for us.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Men of lowest state are but a breath. Men of higher state are a delusion. In the balances they go up, they are together lighter than a breath.

Congregation:

Put no confidence in extortion, set no vain hopes on robbery, if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Once God has spoken, twice have I heard this, that power belongs to God.

Church Congregation:

And that to thee, oh Lord, belongs steadfast love. For thou doth requite man according to his work.

Choir:

(Singing).

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 15th chapter of the gospel according to John, beginning at the 18th verse. Jesus said, if the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belong to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore, the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, servants are not greater than their master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. If they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name because they do not know the one who sent me. Here ends the lesson.

Today is the feast day of Martin of Rome. Also known as Martin the Confessor. Martin was an Italian saint of the sixth and seventh century, a Bishop, the Bishop of Rome, or Pope, and also a martyr. He was born in Umbria in a place that is now named after him, Pian di San Martino. The hagiographies, the stories around him that circulated after his death, said that he was of noble birth, of fierce intelligence, and of limitless charity towards the poor.

What is sure is that he was an important diplomat for many years before becoming Pope, and probably became Pope because he was such an important diplomat. He served the Bishop of Rome and was sent to Istria as an Emissary when the Slavs overtook Istria, this is the area around the Trieste, Italy now. Slovenia, Croatia. The Slaves overran it, and he took a bunch of money there and he redeemed a bunch of the captives.

He then became a diplomat of Pope John the Fourth, and provided communication between the patriarch of Constantinople, who was the Bishop in Constantinople. The Roman capital had moved to the east under Pope Theodore the First. At the time of Martin's life, and this became very consequential for him, there were continuing controversies over the nature of Jesus. Who Jesus was, and what it meant that God became human. And all these controversies lasted for centuries, boiled down to a basic problem of arithmetic. How can two be one? Sometimes they argued about how two substances could become one, two persons, two essences, "ousia," Greek word. At this time, the argument was over wills. Did Christ have two wills, divine and a human will, or just one?

An Eastern emperor in Constantinople had written a letter that said the Imperial belief is that there is one will. Rome didn't like this. They thought there were two. And so, the Bishop of Rome, who at the time was a guy named Theodore, demanded that Paul, the Bishop of Constantinople, retracted this thing, the emperor had said, Paul refused to, Theodore excommunicated him, and then called a council, but he died. And then, Martin became Pope. And he made himself Pope without the approval of the emperor for the first time since Christianity became the state religion. He called the council without the approval of the emperor for the first time since Christianity became the state religion, and then he condemned this one will theory.

So, the emperor had him arrested. Along with his friend Maximus, he brought them to Constantinople. Things got a little too intense for Paul, the Bishop of Constantinople, so he said, "Okay, let's slow things down." He made sure that these two were not executed. But they were imprisoned and tortured. Martin was exiled, died shortly afterwards. His friend Maximus, otherwise known as Maximus, the Confessor, made the mistake of living longer. He was eventually convicted of heresy, had his tongue cut

out so he could speak no more heresy, his right hand cut off so he could write no more heresy. And then died shortly after that.

Twenty-five years after Martin's death, at the Council of Constantinople, the church decided that Martin and Maximus were right, in fact, and declared them innocent. So, if you were wondering, there are two wills, not one. I think this dispute for us, for me anyway, is utterly perplexing. We don't have any idea, many of you, I'm guessing, did not have any idea, before this morning, what a Monothelite or a Diothelite was. You probably still don't. It's hard to imagine why our ancient Christian brothers would care so much about this argument. Care enough to torture and murder one another. Harder still to imagine why we might care at all.

There's another possible explanation. There was a division between the Greek-speaking East and the Latin West. We could call this an ethnic or a cultural dispute. But that's also just question-begging because again, what difference should it make? Why should we torture and murder one another over these differences? Martin of Rome is remembered for defending orthodoxy. The traditional prayers for him say that we remember him for defending orthodoxy, or at least what eventually became called orthodoxy.

And for defending it even to the point of death, that's why he's a martyr. That's why his feast day is today. And though Martin didn't torture anyone that I know of, his behavior in this regard, in this dispute, wasn't great. He was tossing around ex-communications, and condemnations, and anathemas. And I believe had his decisions carried the weight of Imperial power behind it, there probably would've been some tortures and executions too.

This gospel passage we have from John today, which is a sign for Martin, Jesus says, "The world hates you because you are not of the world." And this is a difficult passage for me because it seems to position us against the world. And that temptation is real. We can see it in this awful story from the seventh century. Martin hated Constantinople. And the Emperor Constans hated him. And to be honest, I hate the whole situation. I hate the violence that so riddles our history. I hate the violence that always attends these doctrinal controversies. But Jesus also said in this gospel of John that God sent God's only son not to condemn the world but to save it. Jesus says in the gospel of John, the world will know that you are my disciples, not by your hate, but by your love.

As we turn toward Monday, Thursday, and Good Friday, we will see condemnations and tortures, and executions again. The challenge Jesus sets us this holy week and the one that Martin's grim and disappointing example sets in a troubling negative relief. The challenge is to love a world as ugly and as broken as this one is. To see it, and ourselves, and our enemies as beloved of God, and worth saving, and then to turn ourselves to the difficult work of saving it. Please rise for the prayers. The Lord be with you.

The Rev. Matthew I Potts:

Let us pray. Grant almighty God that we may withstand the trials of this world with invincible firmness of purpose. Just as you did not allow your martyr, Martin of Rome, to be daunted by threats or broken by

suffering. We pray this through our Lord, Jesus Christ, your son, who also suffered and who also died, and who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

And now, let us 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.

The Rev. Matthew I Potts:

Please join in singing our closing hymn, number 152.

Congregation/Choir:

(Singing).

The Rev. Matthew I Potts:

May the God of peace who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus Christ, make you perfect to do God's will. Working in you that which is well pleasing in God's sight. And may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you now and remain with you always.

Church Congregation:

Amen.