

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel of the Memorial Church. I invite you, please, to rise for our responsorial song, which is number 103, and to join in its recitation.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Bless the Lord, oh my soul, all my being His holy name.

Congregation:

Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and do not forget all His benefits.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

He forgives all your sins, heals all your diseases.

Congregation:

He redeems your life from the Pit, surrounds you with steadfast love and mercy.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

The Lord executes righteous acts and judgments for all who are wronged.

Congregation:

He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the children of Israel.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.

Congregation:

He will not contend forever, or nurse His anger for all time.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor has He requited us according to our inequities.

Congregation:

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

As east is far from west, so far has He removed our sins from us.

Choir:
(singing).

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

This is a reading from the ninth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, beginning in the ninth verse. "As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And Matthew got up and followed him. As he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and with his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors 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 a mercy, not sacrifice." For I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners.'" Here ends the lesson.

It's good to be back at my regular Wednesday post speaking to you. Today, appropriately perhaps, is the Feast Day of St. Matthew, my namesake. The traditional account of Matthew is the one that we just heard. There's some traditions added on to this story. Matthew was a tax collector who was called, then became an apostle. According to tradition, he wrote this gospel, the Gospel of Matthew. It was believed to be the first gospel in early theologian in origin, believed it was written first in Hebrew and then translated into Greek.

Matthew is said to have traveled to Northeast Africa, to Ethiopia, in particular, where he evangelized people and where he was ultimately martyred. His relics were translated to Solano, Italy, just South of Naples on the Mediterranean coast in the 10th century. So, this account is almost certainly false. There's no historical evidence for this. I also don't really like it for a couple of reasons. First, believing that the Gospel of Matthew was the first gospel, was the earliest written, was written by a companion of Jesus, it became the most influential of the gospels in the development of early Christian theology.

The actual first gospel is the Gospel of Mark. Early Christians thought that Mark lifted from Matthew. It's actually the other way around, Matthew lifted from Mark. Sometimes I wonder what Christianity would be if we leaned more on Mark, and less on Matthew.

It's also just dubious within the gospels, if you eliminate all the history, when Jesus calls a tax collector, in the other gospels, he doesn't call a tax collector named Matthew, he calls a tax collector named Levi. Levi isn't one of the apostles in those other gospels. Levi disappears from the scene and Matthew is an apostle. So, today is the Feast Day of St. Matthew apostle and evangelist. Technically, he might have been neither of those things. But I do appreciate Matthew's gospel for many reasons that I will explain in a second. And it has to do with one of these dubious histories.

One of the explanations that's given by early Christian theologians about why there's this discrepancy of names between Levi and Matthew is that Jesus renamed Levi, Matthew. Jesus was known to have done this. He did it with Peter. Peter was Simon. He became Peter. The word Matthew, as my mom will attest, the Hebrew name, Mattityahu means Gift of God. So, even though it's not likely that this happened, I like this theory.

Here's why. It would fit not only Jesus' pattern of renaming, but his habit of renaming. No one fails Jesus as utterly as Peter. Yet, he is Peter, the rock, Peter means rock. No one fails Jesus as utterly as Peter and yet he renames him the one upon whom I will build everything. The one I will depend upon the most. No one was as despised as Matthew. And he turned to Matthew and said, "You are a gift of God." Tax collectors, publicans, as the authorized version says, were particularly despised and hated at this time, they were given no salary by the Romans. They collected tax for the Roman Empire. They were given no salary by the Romans, their income came from whatever extra they decided to charge, and they could charge whatever extra they wanted and have that enforced by Imperial law. Judaeen tax collectors were particularly despised by the Judaeen people and seen as betrayers of their own people. No doubt, in many respects, they were.

What did Jesus see when he looked in the tax booth and saw Matthew? I think this is important. He saw a sinner. He didn't see the publicans arrayed before him and see one diamond in the rough that he decided to call and say, "Follow me." He saw him for who he was and loved him, not in spite of his sin, or indifferent to his sin, but because of it and called him. "I came to call sinners, not the righteous."

Indeed, the Gospel of Matthew is full of these noticings, where Jesus or others see something that should not be holy, that ought not to be reckoned as holy, but then is called holy. Only the Gospel of Matthew has the story of the infant Jesus in the stable, and then wise men from the east noticing that this is the Son of God. Only the Gospel of Matthew has Pilate's wife having a dream and realizing that this man is the Son of God.

One of the stories Matthew lifts from Mark is when the Centurion, who kills Jesus, looks up at his dead body and says, "Truly, this was the Son of God." And all the teachings in Matthew, which are beautiful, are about noticing the holy and noticing goodness where we think we ought not to find it, blessed are the meek, blessed are the poor, love your enemy, bless those that curse you. All those folks that we would rather look beyond are cast aside. Folks like Matthew.

We don't know who Matthew really was. He has disappeared from history behind this gospel. He hides there. We cannot see him. We will likely never find him. But all around us, so many others who are also gifts from God hide in plain sight. May we be given grace to see. I invite you please to rise for the prayers. The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew I. 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 and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Now, with those greater words Jesus taught us saying. Our Father, Who art in heaven.

Congregation:

Our Father, Who art in heaven.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Hallowed be Thy name.

Congregation:

Hallowed be Thy name.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Thy kingdom come.

Congregation:

Thy kingdom come.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Congregation:

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Give us this day our daily bread.

Congregation:

Give us this day our daily bread.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

And forgive us our trespasses.

Congregation:

And forgive us our trespasses.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

Congregation:

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

And lead us not into temptation.

Congregation:

And lead us not into temptation.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

But deliver us from evil.

Congregation:

But deliver us from evil.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.

Congregation:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Please rise and sing our closing hymn... Oh, you are rise. Please, join us singing our closing hymn, number 305.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing).

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Before I off the blessing, just a quick announcement, this and each Wednesday, we have coffee and snacks downstairs in the undercroft, in the Oasis kitchen. So if you have a moment, please do take a moment to join us. Now, may the God of all peace fill you with joy and hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew I. Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

This transcript was exported on Sep 21, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.