

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to our service of morning prayers here in the Appleton Chapel of the Memorial Church. I invite you please to rise and join in our responsorial song, which is number 138 in your black psalter.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

I praise you with all my heart, sing a hymn to you before the divine beings.

Congregation:

I bow toward your holy temple and praise your name for your steadfast love and faithfulness, because you have exalted your name, your word, above all.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

When I called, you answered me. You inspired me with courage.

Congregation:

All the kings of the earth shall praise you, oh Lord, for they have heard the words you spoke.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

They shall sing of the ways of the Lord. Great is the majesty of the Lord.

Congregation:

High though the Lord is, He sees the lowly, lofty, He perceives from afar.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Though I walk among enemies, you preserve me in the face of my foes, you extend your hand and your right hand, with your right hand, you deliver me.

Congregation:

The Lord will settle accounts for me. Oh Lord, your steadfast love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, beginning at the first verse.

Soon afterwards, he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The 12 were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities. These were married, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out. And Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources. Here ends the lesson.

Today in the Calendar of Saints, in my church, is the Feast of Paula of Rome. Paula's a fourth century saint. She was born in 347, lived to 404, and like the women in the gospel passage I just read, she provided for people out of her resources. She was a follower of Jesus, a very wealthy person, who tried to use her money in the service of the church. Paula came from one of the most important and influential Roman families, the Furia, a clan that claimed to be descendants of Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae. She's also a close associate of St. Jerome, the person who produced the Latin Bible. And Jerome sort of had this habit of cultivating relationships with wealthy women in Rome, and so, Paula became one of his development targets, I guess.

Paula was widowed at age 32, became close to a woman named Marcella, who was another noble woman from Rome, and another friend of Jerome's. And she became, Paula became, a member of a community that Marcella began, which was sort of a semi-monastic community in Rome. Eventually, Jerome came to Rome and met Paula, and they together went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, went to Egypt. They met with and learned from Hasidics throughout the region, and Jerome and Paula became very close indeed, they ended up spending the rest of their lives together. Some have suggested an amorous relationship between them. It's certain that they loved each other. We don't know how they expressed that love to one another necessarily, but they eventually settled in Bethlehem.

And in Bethlehem, Paula established a monastery for men, and a convent for women, and a hostel for pilgrims. They built their common life, their communal life, around study, study of the holy scriptures. She used her wealth to fund the translation of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament into Latin. And they just had this intense life of study and community.

It was also a place of great hospitality. They welcomed people from all over the region, from Persia, and India, and Ethiopia, not necessarily Christians, many of them refugees. Eventually, they spent all of Paula's wealth, and when she ran out of money, Jerome sold his lands in Croatia and Italy to continue funding the community.

The reading we have this morning comes from the gospel of Luke. Those of you who have been joining us in big church on Sunday know that we've been listening to Luke. And Luke has been having a go at the rich for several weeks in a row, and I've been preaching about it and thinking about it. And as the minister of a rich church at a rich university, I've been trying to hear what Jesus is saying, and not avoid or evade his good news.

And I have to be honest, when I read about Paula's family and about her story, I was inclined to be a little bit cynical about Paula. I sat with her story longer than I usually do in composing these remarks. It's not just the circumstance out of which she came, but it's also the period out of which she comes. She comes from 4th century Rome. This is the time when Christianity was moving into becoming the

imperial religion, becoming the Constantinian religion, the official religion of the state. It started to accrue all this power and it started to do things with power that institutions with power often do, namely, cause harm.

But as I thought more about Paula, I realized that I was being too cynical. Because what Paula actually did was leave Rome, and create a large community of prayer and study in Bethlehem, while accepting, and housing, and hosting people from far and wide. In other words, she basically invented the university, 700 years before the university was invented in Europe.

This reading comes from the gospel of Luke. Later on in the gospel of Luke, chapter 18, there's the story of the rich young ruler. A person who comes to Jesus, a man who comes to Jesus, and says, "What must I do?" And Jesus says, "You've done everything. There's just one more thing. Give away everything you own." And we're told that Jesus looked at him and loved him, and the rich man walked away sad. It occurs to me that Paula heard the same message 300 years later. And instead of walking away sad, she walked to Bethlehem and gave away all she had.

And it makes me think more about this passage from Luke, but what we see is, this passage from Luke is actually the story of the woman who anoints Jesus's feet, and the men around Jesus are all complaining about it. And then we have the story of these women, Mary of Magdala, Joanna, Susanna, who provided for them out of their resources. And then we have the story later on in the gospel of two of these women, Mary and Joanna, who go to Jesus's tomb, while all the men have run away. The witness of these women and failure of these men.

Immediately after this story, we have the parable of the sower, who sowed seeds, and some take root and some do not. And as I was reflecting further upon Paula, I thought of how often the word of God has taken root in the lives of women, and how often the church has been disinclined to acknowledge the great yield of that harvest. And so, I am grateful for Paula today, grateful of her ministry, for her ministry and her mission, and for her memory. Please rise for the prayers.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Compel us, oh God, to attend diligently to your word, as did your faithful servant, Paula. That by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, we may find it profitable for doctrine, for proof, for correction, and for instruction and righteousness. And that thereby, we may be made wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And now, Let us pray 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:

Please join in singing our concluding hymn, number 347.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and always. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Praise be to God.