

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Morning. Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel of the Memorial Church. Just a note for this morning, our Jewish friends will be observing Yom Kippur in this space this morning. In order to aid in their commune good fast, we will not have coffee hour. We will not have Mem Cafe downstairs after the service, so we will see you there next week.

I invite you please to rise and join in saying our responsorial psalm, which is number 23 in your black psalter.

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

Congregation:

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in straight paths for his name's sake.

Congregation:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies. Thou hast anointed my head with oil. My cup runneth over.

Congregation:

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 11th chapter of the gospel of Matthew, beginning at the 28th verse. "At that time, Jesus said, "Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Here ends the lesson.

So in the Anglican calendar, there is no saint for today. It's a little discouraging that we couldn't come up with 365 holy people within our history, but that's how it is. Yesterday was the Feast of Francis of Assisi, one of the best known Christian saints and so we'll talk about him today.

Francis was baptized with the name Giovanni in Assisi, while his father, who was a wealthy silk merchant, was away in France making money. And when his father returned from France, he was just so excited about having made so much money that he renamed his son Francesco, "Frenchman."

As a young man, Francis delighted in the finer things. To put it mildly, he lived lavishly, but he always showed a tendency towards charity. He was inclined to be generous to beggars. As was not uncommon, he joined a military expedition as a young man, was taken prisoner, was a prisoner for about a year, came home and then joined another army in Apulia. And while there, he had some sort of strange vision, and then he returned home disinterested, disillusioned with the high life.

He took pilgrimage to Rome, begged on this pilgrimage, sought solitude where he could find it. Returned to Assisi, and in the church of San Damiano, had a vision of Christ saying to him, "Restore my ruined church." Francis took that literally. The church was not in good repair, and so he went home and sold a bunch of his father's silk and brought the money to the priest. The priest, knowing that his father was a hard man, rejected the money. His father also, Francis' father, also got very angry. Francis hid for a while. When he finally returned home, his father beat him and locked him in a small room.

His mother freed him. He returned to the church of San Damiano, where he was given sanctuary by the priest. His father brought suit against him to try to get keep him from receiving an inheritance. But at the trial before the bishop, so something bishops did back then I guess, at the trial before the bishop, Francis renounced his father and renounced his patrimony, and began living as a vicar in Assisi. And he gave the money he raised to repair the churches in the area and also to care for sick people, notably people with Hansen's disease, what we once called leprosy.

While living this way, he heard a sermon about the commissioning of the disciples, and so he decided to try to establish an Order that would be committed to living in poverty and preaching love and peace and penance. They started doing this right away. They weren't unlicensed to preach. This was not necessarily safe for them. And so, they went down from Rome to ask the Pope if they could become an Order. They got an audience with the Pope, and although the Pope did not allow them to become an Order, he concerted them, which practically means he gave them a haircut. But officially, it meant that they were licensed in some way officially by the church, and so that was much safer for them to keep doing what they were doing.

Eventually, the Pope did approved them as an Order, and the friars started preaching throughout Italy, further in Croatia and Spain. Francis traveled to Egypt to negotiate peace between Muslims and Christians during the Crusades. Francis was well known for his love of the natural world. He called creatures his siblings. He called the sun his brother and the moon his sister. There are all these legends, the little flowers of Francis, legends of his relationship, his miraculous relationship with other creatures. These are mostly false.

But he was a remarkable person. We have his writings, and those writings are not legendary, they're real. Those things he actually said at that time in the 13th century. This line, which summarizes his theology, "Your God is of the flesh," he said. "God lives in your nearest neighbor, in every person." At the age of 45, the age I am now, he died in a hut bearing the stigmata of Christ, and with trachoma, which is a disease of the eye.

The church chooses this lesson from Matthew for Francis, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." And I think it first glance, that verse is a little bit too rosy. Francis, it seems to me, had an easy life before he disowned his father, not after. But Jesus isn't really saying what we think He's saying. The word here, which is translated as easy, the word *chrestos* in Greek, actually means "well fit." Easy isn't wrong, a wrong translation necessarily, because an ill-fitted yolk doubles the burden of an ox. But the point here, and I think this is Jesus' point, is that there is a burden. Christ does not promise that we will not be burdened. Rather, Jesus promises that the cross we must carry will fit us so long as we choose the right one.

In many ways, Francis did restore the church. Lines like the line I read have the potential still to restore the church. And no one would say that his task in doing so was easy. It was difficult. But there's a difference between a difficult task which is the wrong load to carry, and a difficult task which is the one we are meant to bear.

And while for those of us who are far less saintly than Francis, this is kind of a frightening thing, that we must carry a burden. There's also a way that it can be freeing. We don't need to shoulder the wrong burdens. Francis cast off an abusive father and excess wealth. And by every account after doing so, despite all the hardships, he was a man of joy and peace for the rest of his life, joy and peace that he shared with others and that we, in his memory, might share with others also after this moment.

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

Audience:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Most high, omnipotent, and good Lord, grant your people grace to renounce gladly the vanities of this world, that following the way of blessed Francis, we may for the love of you, delight in your whole creation with perfectness of joy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And now, let us pray a word Jesus taught us, saying...

The Rev. Matthew Potts and audience:

"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 to trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please join in singing our closing hymn, number 23.

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 this day and always. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

The Rev. Matthew Potts and Congregation:

Thanks be to God.

The Rev. Matthew Potts and audience:

(organ music plays)