

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel of Memorial Church. I invite you please, to rise and join in our responsorial Psalm, which is number 92 in your black psalter.

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to thy name, O Most High.

Congregation:

To declare thy steadfast love in the morning, and thy faithfulness by night.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

To the music of the lutes and the harp, to the melody of the lyre.

Congregation:

For thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by your work, at the works of thy hands I sing for joy.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

Congregation:

They are planted in the house of the Lord, they flourish in the courts of our God.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

They still bring forth fruit in old age. They are ever full of sap and green.

Congregation:

To show that the Lord is upright, He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 4th chapter of the Gospel of John, beginning at the 21st verse.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship God must worship in spirit in truth."

The woman said to him, "I know the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am He, the one who is speaking to you." Here ends the lesson.

You know I preach on the Saints in my tradition, and in the calendar of Saints, after the name of the person you remember, it always tells you what they are remembered for. So last week, we had Philip, Philip Apostle. I said, Philip Apostle. It says, Benedictine monk.

This week is Henry Martyn, and the word after his name is missionary. Henry Martyn, missionary. And if you were here for my talk last week about Philip, you know that I am ambivalent about missionary evangelism. And so, it's only right that this would be the name that shows up on the calendar for me this week.

I thought about talking about St. Luke, who was yesterday's Saint, that would've been nice. Monday was Ignatius of Antioch, who was eaten by lions in the Coliseum. I think of the excitement there would've been in that talk. But I'm going to remember Henry Martyn today.

One of the things about remembering all the church Saints is that, you also have to remember all the things that the church has regarded as saintly, and those might not be things that we today regard as saintly, but failing to remember those things would be to pretend that they are not a part of our history, and that is something we cannot do. So today, we remember Henry Martyn, missionary.

Henry was born in Truro, Cornwall, in 1781, the son of a mine supervisor. He went to St. John's College in Cambridge, where he became the Senior Wrangler. I guess that's what they called the best student of math at the University of Cambridge. And then after hearing some evangelicals preach in the early 1800s, he decided to become a missionary like them, and was ordained, first a deacon and then a priest in the Church of England. He could not afford to send himself off to the missions, and so he became a chaplain with the British East India Company in 1806.

He only lived for six more years, but he spent those six years traveling to India, and Iran, and Turkey. In those six years, he translated the New Testament into Hindi, then Urdu, then Persian. Then he translated the Psalms into Persian, then the Gospels into Judaeo-Persic. And then the Book of Common Prayer into Urdu. That was in six years. The industry and his facility with languages, to learn these languages, and then provide translations in six years is astounding. He was sick almost all the time. The doctors prescribed him a sea voyage because of his ill health. I guess that was a prescription. This time he began learning Arabic, because he wanted to also make an Arabic New Testament. Left for Turkey, he got caught in Anatolia where the plague was raging, and he died there, and was buried by Armenian Orthodox priests.

As I said, there are things to be bothered by in the story of Henry Martyn. The fact that his chaplaincy was with the British East Indian Company reminds us of how deeply Christianity is tied both to colonialism and to early global capitalism. He's important to remember, because he reminds us, it reminds me anyway, that Christianity has not spread innocently. It also occurs to me that Henry was a good and well intentioned person operating within an evil system. And that might be familiar, it's familiar to me, anyway. I hope I'm good intentioned. I also know that I am complicit in lots of things. The harms of which I don't condone, but I'm not sure how to extract myself from.

But there's also something else too about his story, and about this lesson from the Gospel of John. This lesson is one which is often used when speaking of missionaries in the church calendar, because the stories of Jesus, he's in Samaria, and he's talking to a Samaritan woman at this well, and he just asked her for water. And then we had this exchange, where he tells her what you think is wrong, think what I think. Sort of this missionary exchange.

But I'm going to rip off John Green a little bit. John Green, who was our noble lecturer on Friday, and actually talked about this passage. What John focused on in his lecture, when he briefly mentioned this

exchange in Samaria, John remarked that it seemed important to him that God and the person Jesus would be thirsty, and that he would not be able to get a drink by himself. And that in order to get a drink, he would have to ask for help from someone else. He says to her, "Please give me a drink." And she says, "You don't have a cup to get any water. I can help you." And that in asking someone else, God made human in Jesus, would have to reach across all the laws and boundaries of relation and purity that would separate them.

I left out one detail of Henry Martyn. The first place he stopped with the British East India Company was at the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa. It was right when the British were capturing it as a colony. It was his first stop, and he ministered to dying British soldiers there, and he saw the horrors of war. And not just the horrors of war, but also the horrors of colonialism. And even though even then, and even though he still felt compelled to bring the good news to others, he wrote in his diary that missionary efforts must be purged of the evils of colonialism.

He didn't leave the company, but maybe it's meaningful that after that point, he spent the rest of his short life learning the languages of others, language study and translation. Despite his undoubted complicity in projects of great harm, he devoted his life to understanding, to trying to understand what others were saying and how they were speaking. For those of us who are also caught up and complicit in large systems which do great harm, this may be something we ought to remember.

I invite you, please, to rise for the prayers.

Let us pray. Oh God of the nations, who gave to Your servant, Henry Martyn, a longing to share Your gospel with all peoples, inspire the church in our own day with that said desire, that we may be eager to commit both our life and our talents to You who gave them. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Now, let us pray together 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 closing hymn, number 276.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing).

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Glory to God, His 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 in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.