

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 saying our responsorial Psalm, which is number six in your black psalter.

O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.

Congregation:

Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak. O Lord, heal me, for my bones are vexed.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

My soul is also sore vexed, but thou, O Lord, how long?

Congregation:

Return, O Lord, deliver my soul, oh save me for thy mercies' sake.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

For in death there is no remembrance of thee, in the grave who shall give thee thanks?

Congregation:

I am weary with my groaning, all the night make I my bed to swim, I water my couch with my tears.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Mine eye is consumed because of grief, it waxeth old because of all mine enemies.

Congregation:

Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity, for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

The Lord hath heard my supplication, the Lord will receive my prayer.

Congregation:

Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed, let them return and be ashamed suddenly.(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John, beginning at the 24th verse.

Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and does not come under judgment, but is passed from death to life. Very truly, I tell you, the hour is

coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the son also to have life in himself and he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man." Here ends the lesson.

Today, November 2nd, is the Feast of All Souls, or the feast of All the Faithful Departed. It is the third day in what is usually known, or often known, as Allhallowtide. So Halloween, All Hallows' Eve, is the first day, then All Saints Day was yesterday, and today is All Souls.

These are all festivals in their own way that commemorate the dead. And there's a long tradition of commemorating the dead within the Christian tradition and Christian life. It began as a commemoration, a celebration of the martyrs, of those who had died from the faith. And these celebrations of Christian martyrs began as early as the 4th century in Greece and in Syria. They started taking root in Italy in the 5th century. And usually, I mean there was no standard date. Usually these commemorations happened either around Easter or Pentecost, which makes sense if you're remembering the dead, especially those died due to persecution for their faith. You would imagine Easter would be an appropriate time to make that celebration thinking about new life. Or Pentecost, when we celebrate the work of the church. That would be another time when these celebrations would happen.

In the 8th century however, this celebration of the dead began being celebrated in the British Isles on November 1st. Some scholars surmise that this may have been because there's a Celtic festival called Samhain, which tends to happen or occur at the end of October, early November, which was a festival of the dead, and also a harvest festival. Not all scholars think this is right, but some do. And if it is right, it would be reasonable and understandable, because it may be sort of an organic thing. People who are already celebrating the dead in early November, when they take up Christianity, they start to use that date for their Christian celebrations.

It might also be the case of the church, wanting to stamp out Celtic religious celebrations, decided to hold their celebration on that day. It also may have been a combination of the two things. In any case, November 1st became the day. And instead of just the martyrs, it became celebrating all the saints and that date spread throughout Christendom, and now across around the world, November 1st is All Saints Day. But today is not November 1st, today is November 2nd, All Souls Day. And as I said, it's the third of three days. The biggest, if you ask my kids, being All Hallow Eve, Halloween a couple days ago.

I'm not an anthropologist, but my own theory as to why this one celebration originally for martyrs split into three, why All Saints became three different celebrations, is because the dead are not all saints. Even the saints are not all saints, as you will have heard if you've been coming to my talks this term. And so, if you actually want to remember the dead, you have to cover more than just succinctly. And so we see the celebration splitting in the three parts. All Hallows' or All Saints celebrates what are called the saints triumphant in heaven, those heroic figures of Christian faith. All Hallows' Eve morphed into sort of a counter festival of the damned. And then, All Souls, this day recalls those faithful departed who are just regular folks like you and me. Neither the ones holy enough to go straight to heaven, nor the ones condemned to eternal perdition, but the ones still awaiting entry. In other words, the three days for like, hell, heaven, and then, purgatory. Today was a bid for purgatory. And I'll tell you that All Souls is my favorite of these three days.

I'm not really a candy person. I don't love candy. I tend to prefer pastry if I'm going to treat myself to something, so Halloween was never a big thing for me. And you all have heard how I feel about saintliness, and so, All Saints is not my favorite. So All Souls becomes my favorite day in Allhallowtide, sort of by default. I don't have any theological commitment whatsoever to purgatory, but I love the idea of remembering all the departed, in all the fullness of their humanity.

It seems to me that that is the best form of memory. To remember our ancestors, neither as demons nor as angels, but as fallible, flawed humans, who are also capable in moments of goodness and grace. And to know these, our ancestors, in all their complexity. To know them in all their fallenness, also to be beloved of God, and to be capable of goodness and grace, is to recognize the reach and scope of God's love. And also, the reach and scope of God's capacity to act through imperfect creatures, and in a fallen creation. And it's also, I think, to recognize that whatever we regular, fallen, fallible folks, whatever future we might build will be one that necessarily must stand upon a complicated and implicated history.

I invite you please rise to the verse.

The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Oh God, the maker and redeemer of all, grant to the faithful departed the unsearchable benefits of the passion of your Son, then that on the day of His appearing, they may be manifested as your children. 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 Potts:

And let us now 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 us singing our concluding hymn, number 336.(singing).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:

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Thanks be to God.