

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to 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 one in your black Psalter. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

Congregation:

"But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

Congregation:

"The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Therefore, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous."

Congregation:

"For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

Choir:

(singing).

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

So reading from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, beginning at the 19th verse. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness. No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." Here ends the lesson.

Ireland, as far as I understand, has three patron saints. Patrick, who is actually not from Ireland, but probably a British-Roman person who was kidnapped and then taken to Ireland. But he definitely

existed. Columba who was Irish, but then left Ireland for Scotland, and also definitely existed. And today's St. Brigid, the saint we remember today. Who is definitely Irish, but maybe, probably didn't exist.

Brigid is meant to have lived from the late fifth to the early sixth century in Ireland, but the earliest account we have of her is from the seventh century, in some hymns. Meanwhile, the St. Brigid shares a name with an ancient Celtic goddess named Brigid, and her feast day is on the same day today. Ireland's festival spring Imbolc, is today a national holiday in Ireland this year, for the first time ever. Many of the accounts of St. Brigid are versions of folktales of the goddess, and she is associated with many of the same things.

You prayed to Brigid for the same things you would pray to the goddess Brigid about. For healing, for protection, poetic inspiration, other kinds of artistry, metalwork especially. For the health of your livestock. So some scholars believe that she was kind of simply lifted whole-cloth out of Celtic religion and made into a Christian saint. And this happens sometimes. The European cults of the St. Josaphat for example, which was very popular in the Middle Ages, had to be suppressed eventually. Because it turns out Josaphat is a latinized version of the word bodhisattva. And Josaphat was actually Gautama Buddha.

It's also quite possible, and I actually think this is the most likely thing, that there was a Christian woman named Brigid. Who was basically, we didn't know much about her. And she was absorbed into the legends that already existed around the goddess Brigid. But then, again, who was she? According to tradition, Brigid was sold into slavery to Druids as a child. She refused to eat their food. When they fed her, she vomited. Saying then, because she was not eating, a cow showed up, which was all white with red ears. And she consumed what the cow gave her.

Eventually, the St. Brigid founded a religious community at Kildare, on the site of a pagan shrine to the goddess Brigid. She started churches all over Ireland. Legend says, tradition has it. She performed lots of miracles, tricking kings into giving land to the poor. There's a story where she was with some maidens who were unable to speak, and she tripped and fell, and grazed her head. And dropped some blood from the wound, and gave them their speech.

She was vowed to celibacy. And so a man came and said he was going to marry her, and so she plucked out her own eye and handed it to him. I think that's why we have our Gospel lessons there about the eye being full of light and healthier and healthy. And my own favorite miracle she's known for, is of turning water into beer. Brigid is meant to have been friends with Patrick, who was in Ireland at about the same time as she is meant to have lived. But we have lots more historical evidence for him than for her. With this lesson from Jesus today, and this possibly fabricated saint or partially fabricated saint. And that made Jesus' teaching about storing up treasures in heaven interesting, let's say.

When Jesus says, "Don't store your treasure up in things that aren't real, but in real things." And we have a saint we're talking about today, the reality of which, it's hard to confirm. And this is a real question for Christianity, and it's the question I think Jesus is raising in this passage. Where do we place our hope? Where do we put that which is most valuable to us? Where is our treasure?

Christianity has been rightly accused at times of a sort of sweet hereafter-ism. If I can coin the phrase. A fatalism or an otherworldliness that makes it inclined to neglect the present. Oh, the sweet hereafter. We'll get through the by and by. In the sweet hereafter, things will work out. In the end, which just leads to complacency, and maybe complicity. And that's one way to read what Jesus is saying here when he says, "Do not store treasures there, store them somewhere else." But Jesus speaks about the kingdom of heaven throughout his ministry, not just in this passage. "The kingdom of heaven is near." That phrase is one that he says right from the beginning of his ministry, as I said in a sermon here two weeks ago. And when he says the kingdom of heaven is near, I don't think he means temporarily, I think he means spatially.

I don't think he means it's near as in coming around the corner soon, you will have to get ready for it, because eventually you're going to see it. But rather, I think he means that it's near like that, it's right next to you. The distinction is not between this and some future world, between this world of corruption and another one which will be uncorruptible. It's a distinction in this world between that which is right next to us, but which can last. Things like love, and faithfulness, and goodness, which are hard to grab onto, but which do last. And those things, which you maybe can hold more easily, like gold and material things, which won't. Insofar as the legends of this unlikely saint, speak to these things which do last. Goodness and generosity, tricking a king into giving his land to the poor. Saving maidens who were disabled, serving others. They remain holy stories which draw us towards holiness. And so we give thanks for the memory of Brigid today. I invite you to please to rise to the prayers. The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Oh God, whose servant Brigid, kindled with the flame of your love, became a shining light in your church: Grant that we also may be aflame with the spirit of love and discipline, and walk before you as children of light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And let us pray the words Jesus taught us, saying, "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, the power and the glory, for ever and ever." Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please join in singing our closing hymn number 288.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing).

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And now may the peace 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:

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Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.