

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to our service, Morning Prayers, here in the Appleton Chapel of the Memorial Church. I invite you please to rise and join in reading our responsorial Psalm, which is number 72 in your black psalter.

Give the king thy justice O God, and thy righteousness to the royal son.

Congregation:

May he judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with justice!

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people and the hills in righteousness.

Congregation:

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor!

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

May he live while the sun endures in as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

Congregation:

May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth!

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

In his days, may righteousness flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more.

Congregation:

May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth!

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him.

Congregation:

For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Mark, beginning at the 15th verse.

"And Jesus said to them, go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe. By using my name, they will cast out demons, they will speak in new tongues, they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them. They will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover. So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it." Here ends the lesson

Today, of course, is February 15th, and there is a saint in the Anglican calendar for today, a 17th century English cleric. But I want to talk about yesterday instead. Yesterday was the Great Saints Day, of course. The Feast of Saints, Cyril and Methodius. Valentine was removed from the calendar in 1969, because we actually don't know anything about Valentine, except that he died. Which is basically what we know of anyone. And so, he was replaced with Cyril and Methodius, who were known as the apostles to the Slavs. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, they're known as equal to the apostles. Very influential saints from Thessalonica, born in Thessalonica in the 9th century in the 1820s. As I said, highly revered in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The Roman Catholic Church incorporated them into its calendar in the 1880s. And in the 1980s, John Paul II, who was the first Slav to be Pope, made them the patrons of all Europe. Cyril was named Constantine, and called Constantine for most of his life. He was given the name Cyril in Rome, just shortly before he died. His brother Methodius was born Michael, but was renamed Methodius when he became a monk in Turkey.

We don't know a lot about their family history. We know a lot about their life and ministry, but their family history is unclear. Their father died when they were young. It's possible they had some Slavic ancestry, which is why they felt called to minister to the Slavs. We know that after their father died, they were raised by an important Byzantine official, so they came from a family of some significance.

Cyril was sent on an early mission to the Khazars in Crimea. When he returned to Constantinople, he became a philosopher and a scholar. His brother Methodius became a monk, an administrator, a city administrator.

When they weren't too old, they were invited by Rastislav, the king of Moravia. Moravia is what now covers much of Central Europe. They were invited by Rastislav to come evangelize the Slavs. This was a tricky thing, because they are actually already Christian. It was actually a political invitation. Moravia was closely aligned with the Franks, with the kind of descendants of Charlemagne. And Rastislav wanted to realign with the Byzantine emperor, rather than the Holy Roman emperor. And so, he wanted some Greek speaking evangelists to come to the Slavs. So they did. Cyril and Methodius went to Moravia, and probably because one was a scholar and philosopher and the other was an administrator, they took some important first steps in evangelizing the Slavs.

The first thing they did was to translate the Gospels into Slavonic, old churchless Slavonic. To do this, they needed to invent an alphabet, and so, they invented what was called then the Glagolitic, which became the Cyrillic alphabet, the alphabet that's still used by many Slavic speaking peoples. They developed some liturgies appropriate to the Slavs into Slavic culture and traditions. They wrote a new Slavic civil code.

This really upset the Franks and the Germans, as you might expect. The Franks believed that Moravia was their mission field, not the mission field of the Byzantines. And so, it caused a lot of conflict in that

the Frankish approach was different than Cyril and Methodius'. The Frankish approach to evangelization was, everyone should do everything in Latin. There is one culture, one form, which is standard, and this is what we should impress upon the people. Cyril and Methodius had a different approach. They translated everything into the language of the people.

There was a lot of conflict. There were some attempts on the lives of Cyril and Methodius, so they went back to Rome. This is before the Church of the East and the Church of the West broke apart. And so, the Bishop of Rome was still the final authority. And so, Cyril and Methodius went to Rome to plead their case to the Pope, who approved a Slavic language liturgy, Slavic translation, and Slavic usage in the Slavic nations. While they were in Rome, Cyril died. But kind of putting to bed all questions, Methodius was named Archbishop of Moravia, and sent back to minister in the people's language.

These lines from the Gospel of Mark, which I read, are the last five verses of the Gospel passage. They are not in the original form of the Gospel of Mark. There are actually three endings to the Gospel of Mark. If you look closely in the notes in your Bible, it ends once, and then there's another ending, because the first isn't very satisfactory. And then there's a third ending, because even the second ending isn't that satisfactory. And the third ending is the one we get today. And in general, because of that, I avoid the second two endings. I like the unsatisfying first ending most. And the other two were, as I said, not original, but really, that's just me making kind of a fuss.

None of this is original. The Gospel of Mark is not an original eyewitness account. It is written at least 30, probably more like 50 or 60 years after the death of Jesus. And the problem, of course, is deeper just than which version of the Gospel of Mark we read, we have four Gospels. And even the ones that are most alike are radically different. The only consistent thing with scripture, and with the story of Jesus, is its inconsistency. As my former colleague and former teacher, Mark Jordan has said, "To read the story of Jesus at all is to read one story, told at least four ways."

This presents a problem of fact, a historical problem. But I think this historical problem is also a theological opportunity. What we learned from reading the Gospels, these many stories, is there is no one single way to speak the truth. And this is what Cyril and Methodius knew when they decided not to impress upon the Slavs a Latin culture, and a Latin language, and a Latin liturgy, but to listen to them, and to learn their language, and to learn from them, so they could speak to them more truly and more directly.

And this third version of Mark, and Cyril and Methodius' ministry, and our complicated and incoherent scripture, what it reveals to us is that what Christianity celebrates and honors in its roots is not uniformity, but diversity. May we also celebrate diversity in all its forms.

Please rise as we pray. The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Almighty and everliving God, who by the power of the Holy Spirit, moved your servants, Cyril and Methodius, to bring the light of the Gospel to a divided people. Overcome all bitterness and strife among us by the love of Christ, and make us one united family under the banner of the Prince of Peace, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. 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. 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.

Please join me in singing hymn 230.

Congregation/Choir:
(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.