

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 reciting our responsorial Psalm, which is number 142 in your black psalter. Number 142.

I cry with my voice to the Lord; with my voice I make supplication to the Lord.

Congregation:

I pour out my complaint before him, I tell my trouble before him.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

When my spirit is faint, thou knowest my way. In the path where I walk, they have hidden a trap for me.

Congregation:

I look to the right and watch, but there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me, no man cares for me.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

I cry to thee, O Lord, I say, thou art my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.

Congregation:

Give heed to my cry, for I have been brought very low. Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Bring me out of prison that I may give thanks to thy name.

Congregation:

The righteous will surround me; for thou wilt deal bountifully with me.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the Gospel of Mark. One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the cornfields and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And Jesus said to them, "Have you ever read what

David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions." Then He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath. And so, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." Here ends the lesson.

Those of you who are regulars to this Morning Prayers service know that I like to preach about the saints. So talk about the saints when I stand up here to talk. And today's saint is a man named John Keble, a 19th century Englishman, who I will not talk about today. This right now, if you want to come back and hear about him, I'll talk about him in our communion service at 12:15, because it's our week when we're thinking about climate at these talks. And because we just returned our group from the church from Iceland, I want to tell you about Thorlak Thorhallsson. From Skálholt. Thorlak is the patron saint of Iceland. His feast day is Thorláksmessu, which is December 23rd. We're never here on December 23rd, so we'll remember him today. Thorlak was born in 1133, ordained a deacon at age 15, and priest at age 18. He went to Paris to study with the Victorines, who were the scholars of the day in the 12th century. And he went to England, to Lincoln, to study canon law.

Having learned the Augustinian rule from the Victorines, he brought it to Iceland and established a monastery of Augustinian canons there. He refused to marry a rich widow. Marriage was common among Icelandic priests at the time. He refused to marry a rich widow, was consecrated a bishop, and then went to the interior a bit, from the coast where he was from, to a place called Skálholt. He decided to build a church there, because he found a hot spring, which is now called Thorlak Skagafjörður, in which many of us discovered while we were walking around Skálholt. He blessed it and built a settlement there. And for centuries, this was the central settlement in Iceland.

As I was reading about Thorlak while in Iceland, one of the things that struck me is that he was particularly devoted to the Lord's Prayer as a prayer practice. And he had a habit of sitting in a rock outcrop overlooking the landscape, which is now called Thorlak Seat. And the last day were in Iceland, I walked there and sat and prayed the Lord's Prayer and looked at these two volcanoes in the distance that I'm sure Thorlak looked at as well when he prayed, the volcano's Hekla. Yeah, Hekla.

Iceland is such a beautiful place. It's also such an uncompromising place. The only thing that really can grow there, given the climate, is grass. And so, when humans settled there, they brought sheep to eat the grass. The fish also, but there's not great fishing, and you've probably heard this if you've watched food shows, they eat Greenland shark, which is poisonous unless you ferment it.

In the early 15th century in Iceland, a plague killed half the population. In the late 15th century, another plague killed another half of the population. In the 18th century, a volcano erupted in southeast Iceland, that released toxic gas and killed a third of the population. And these, although it's a popular tourist destination, these things are still a threat. In the 1970s, the Westman Islands, just off the coast of Iceland, had to be evacuated because the volcano erupted and flowed into the village Hekla. The volcano that Thorlak looked at is due to erupt. It erupts about every 10 years, and has not erupted in 20. And when it does, our hosts there said, "We hope it's a tourist eruption, a little trickle of red lava." She said, "But no one knows. It might be one of these toxic gas eruptions again."

And in spite of this, in spite of this difficult landscape, this uncompromising landscape, we have the record of the Icelanders, not just Skálholt Cathedral and the beautiful tradition, the poem we just sung, or that the choir just sung for us. Also, the literary tradition of the sagas. The schools they built, the relationship to the land, which they knew they had to coach life from. And so, they did not treat it as an antagonist, but as a partner in the first, the world's first parliament, the Alþingi. There was no choice but to work together, because life was too hard. And so, they developed a model of shared governance, before the rest of the world did, by several hundred years.

Thorlak inhabited a world that was precarious to a degree that is difficult to imagine for us today, especially for those of us privileged enough to sit in this chapel, but probably for all modern humans. The worst infant mortality rates in the world today approach 10%. And that is unjust, and infuriating, and awful. But for most of its history, the infant mortality rate in Iceland was about one in three.

What is compelling to me about Thorlak and about Skálholt is that, for most of its history in Iceland survival was not only not a given, it was not even an expectation. And yet, the resilience and resolve to live in the face of impending disaster, and to do that meaningfully, and justly, with the land and with one another, was commonplace among these people.

We who understand the threats of climate change, know that we are facing catastrophe, and we are in the unique position, one our ancestors did not have, of understanding the causes of our catastrophe, and having the power to avoid the catastrophe. To be clear, this should anger and arouse us more, not less. Imagine, I imagine, that if Thorlak could have done anything to reduce the infant mortality rate in Iceland he would have.

We squander what previous generations, like those of Iceland, one with their resilience, their resourcefulness, and their survival. But it also serves, I think, for us to recall that resilience, resourcefulness, and survival, have actually been the norm of human life, not the exception. Last week, we had a lecturer come on behalf of the Church to Divinity School, a woman named Dekila Chungyalpa, who's a Tibetan environmentalist activist who works with religious leaders. And a question from the crowd to her was, "Where do you find hope? How can you hope?" And she said, "I think that's the wrong question. The question is not where do we find hope, it's where do we find courage? Because courage is what will be required."

I take courage from Thorlak and Skálholt, and from Iceland, not to romanticize the generations of their suffering, but to recognize the generations of their resilience. And as we do this, this morning, we should note, that they took their own courage and forged their own survival from certain things, from a commitment to common life, to shared governments, to a relationship with the land, and to habits of selflessness, learning, prayer, and hard, hard work. May we, like Blessed Thorlak, be granted the grace of similar habits, and the gifts of courage and of survival.

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

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Grant O God, that in times of trial and hardship, we may know your presence and accomplish your will. That following the example of your servant, Thorlak of Skálholt, we may accomplish with integrity and courage what you give us to do, and endure what you give us to bear, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And now, like Thorlak, we pray the prayer Jesus taught us, saying...

Congregation:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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:

At special request, our closing hymn has been changed from the one on your service order. It's correct on the boards, we will sing number 158. Hymn 158 is our closing hymn.

Congregation/Choir
(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

A reminder to please join us downstairs for refreshments immediately following the service. And if you can, to join us at 12:15 for our last Lenten communion service today, and to hear about John Keble.

Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation, to the church, and to Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.