

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to our daily service of 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 133 in your black psalter.

How good and pleasant it is that brothers dwell together.

Congregation:

It is like fine oil on the head running down onto the beard, the beard of Aaron, that comes down over the collar of his robe.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Like the dew of Herman that falls upon the mountains of Zion.

Congregation:

There the Lord ordained blessing, everlasting life.

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 14th chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Beginning at the 28th verse. Jesus said, "For which of you intending to build a tower does not first sit down and estimate the cost to see whether he has enough to complete it. Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with 10,000 to oppose the one who comes against him with 20,000. If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions." Here ends the lesson

Today in our church calendar, we remember a fifth century monk from Egypt, Smaragdus of Alexandria. In the year 410 in Alexandria, a very wealthy, very devout man, named Paphnutius, and his wife could not conceive, and so they went to the local monastery and they had the Abbots and all the monks pray that they might conceive and they did. And they had a daughter named Euphrosyne.

She was baptized at seven, educated in the scriptures, and she became well-known for her learning. At 12, Euphrosyne's mother died. At 18, she had many, many suitors. She was reportedly very beautiful, and her father was very wealthy. Her father arranged her in marriage to the wealthiest and most powerful among her suitors, and to bless the marriage Paphnutius and Euphrosyne went to the monastery to pray for a blessing on the marriage. When they visited, Euphrosyne decided that she wanted to become a monk. A monk from the monastery came to her house on some other business. She told him of her wish, and he advised her to live as a man, and become one. She sent for another monk

to visit her, seeking a second opinion. The other monk agreed, shaved her head and invested her as a monk. He took the name Smaragdus, went to the local monastery, was unrecognized by the Abbot, we're told, and then lived as a monk for 38 years.

According to the accounts we have, his father continued to grieve the disappearance of his child, and in old age, Smaragdus became his father's spiritual advisor. When Smaragdus was dying, he confessed his past to his father. And then after the saint died, his father also, Paphnutius, also entered the same monastery, and lived as a monk for the rest of his life.

When I see you on Wednesdays and I talk about these ancient saints, I often mention what I find likely or not in these old stories. Here's what I don't find likely in this story, that this Abbot did not recognize Smaragdus when he arrived at the monastery. To be clear, there was a convent of nuns next door. What is most likely is that the way the monk, excuse me, the way the Abbot responded, is the way that the other two monks responded, to invite and embrace Smaragdus as a brother monk. In other words, what is most likely, is that some very serious Christians in fifth century's Egypt had more complex and more compassionate understandings of gender than many Christians today.

In this gospel lesson from Jesus, we have this odd final sentence, you must give up all your possessions, which doesn't really follow from the examples we've had before, the king with his armies and the tower builder. What are their possessions? What are they attached to? Most of the time, when Jesus mentions these attachments, it's wealth. But the king does not give up all his wealth. The tower builder does not give up all his wealth. What they are attached to, I think, are their ideas about the way things ought to be. What Smaragdus reveals to us, is that human gender has always been more complicated than our ideas about it. And when we become more attached to our ideas about it, than we are to the people before us, we may end up sacrificing them to our ideas, harming them through the immovability of our doctrine. Thank God for this Abbot and these monks, who saw a brother monk when Smaragdus asked to become one. Thank God for Smaragdus, who had the courage to ask to be seen.

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

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Merciful God, who looks not with outward eyes, but discerns the heart of each, we confess that those whom we love the most are often strangers to us. Give us all, we pray, the grace to see one another as we truly are, and as you have called us to be, as your children, cast and cared for in your image. All that we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our only mediator and advocate. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And now we 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 in singing our concluding hymn, number 322.

(singing)

Two short announcements before our final benediction. Please join us down in the undercroft for refreshments, MemCafe, after this service. And also a reminder, that Friday, Inauguration Day, the yard will be closed to those who do not have Harvard IDs. If you do not have a Harvard ID, we hope you will join us via live stream from the website. And now for the blessing. 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 in the church, and to Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.