

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 our Memorial Church. I invite you please to rise and join in saying our responsorial psalm, which is numbered 19 in your black salter. The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

Congregation:

Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard.

Congregation:

Yet their voice goes out through all earth, and their words to the end of the world. In heavens, He had set a tent for the sun.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy. And like a strong man runs its course with joy.

Congregation:

Its rising is from the ends of the heavens and its circuit to the ends of them, and nothing is hid from its heat.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.

Congregation:

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

Congregation:

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 11th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, beginning at the 25th verse. "At that time, Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. And no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I'm gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'"

Here ends the lesson. Today's the Feast Day of Francis of Assisi, the 12th and 13th century saint well-known in Christendom. His story is remarkably like that of the Buddhist story, if you know the Buddhist story. And in fact the Buddha was also remembered in the Christian calendar as St. Jehosaphat for several centuries before being removed when we figured out that he was the Buddha. But like the story of Gautama Buddha, Francis was born to a wealthy family, a wealthy silk merchant. His mother was a French noble woman, his father Italian, and he had a life of carefree, lavish spending. He was a devotee of the troubadour as he dressed in only to finest clothes. If your father's a silk merchant, that's what you do. He was constantly gallivanting off with his friends. He was selling silk and velvets in the marketplace one day and a beggar came and asked him for something and he was shocked and didn't respond and the man ran off. And then Francis chased him and gave him all he had. His friends mocked him. His father was enraged at the losses.

After this, he enlisted in two different armies. He went off to one war and was a prisoner for a while and then returned and then joined another army. And after his service, he went on a pilgrimage to Rome. And while stopping in the ruins of a church in San Damiano and praying, he heard a voice which he took to be the voice of God, which said to him, "Francis, repair my church, which you see is in ruins." He thought the voice was referring to that particular church, which was in fact in ruin. So without asking his father, he went to his father's storehouse and took a bunch of silk and sold it and gave the money to the church. The priest of that church, fearing his father, didn't use it. His father became enraged again. He had Francis in prison for a while. He sued him, sued Francis for his inheritance. And when it came time for the hearing, Francis pulled the legs out from under the lawsuit and renounced his father, renounced to the inheritance and became a mendicant.

He took up the dress of the poorest peasants in Umbria at the time, which is the same dress that Franciscans wear today, a simple brown cloak. And he began preaching to everyone, especially to the poor, love and peace, even though he had no permission from the church to do so, which you needed at the time. Preaching love and peace to those in need of it attracted followers. And so he developed his order and he made a simple rule for his order to follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in His footsteps. As a Christian, several hundred years later, it's interesting to me that that was a rule that needed to be invented. All these legends have sprung up around Francis. They're called the Little Flowers. When I lived in South Bend, I lived next door to a church called Little Flower Catholic Church. And they're these fairytales of Francis' interactions, especially with the natural world, with all creatures, great and small, whom he loved. And if you read only the Little Flowers, you get the sense that his life was like a fairytale. But his life was really difficult.

He tried to spread this message of love and peace every way he could. He saw himself as a missionary and he suffered for it. He was shipwrecked on the way to Jerusalem once. He became ill in Spain, on the

way to Morocco. He went to Egypt during the fifth crusade hoping to convert the Muslim army. The Christian army had laid brutal siege to a city called [inaudible 00:09:44] at the time. And in the midst of a brief truce, he was invited behind the Muslim army's lines and he was received by sultan. We don't know anything about what was said, but he was returned. Late in life, we're told, he received the stigmata, which are the wounds of Christ, and they were very painful. He also had a disease of the eye called sarcoma, which is incredibly painful and leads to eventual blindness. And finally, he died and two years later he was made a saint.

In our gospel passage this morning, Jesus says that what he is bringing is hidden from the wise and intelligent. We like to think ourselves wise and intelligent at Harvard. And so maybe that's something to pay attention to. Maybe it's worth paying attention to the fact that I'm not going to pay attention to that part of the verse. But instead, the second part where Jesus talks about his yoke being easy and his burden light. Francis' youth was full of carefree days, but despite the Little Flowers, his years of following Jesus were anything but easy. And I've said this before here at church, but the Word translated as easy here, *chrestos*, actually doesn't mean easy. It means it fits well.

My yoke fits you well. Easy isn't necessarily a wrong translation because of bad fitting yoke is very hard to use, but the purpose of a yoke is to carry a burden. And the point of this passage, this teaching of Jesus, is that there is a burden. Love is a burden. My mom died about a year ago, just under a year ago, and in the time since then, my dad has been writing a lot about his experience of caring for my mom in her last months. It's not stuff that we knew when she was alive, but we've learned it since. And I have learned how really hellish their last couple of months were, how much of a burden that care was. But my dad would not have had anyone else carry that yoke, nor would he have hoped for it to be lifted from him if it could not be lifted from her. Francis made a simple rule for his brothers, to follow the teachings of Jesus and to walk in his footsteps.

Christ makes no promises to lift all our burdens. I wish he did. What he does promise us is that there are some burdens worth shouldering, and he also tells us how best we might bear that load. I invite you, please to rise and join me in the prayers. The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Most high, omnipotent, good Lord, grant your people grace to renounce gladly the vanities of this world, that following the way of blessed Francis, we may for love of you, delight in your whole creation with perfectness of joy through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives in reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And now we 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 the day our daily of 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. I invite you please to join in singing our closing hymn number 313.

Please join us downstairs in the undercroft after this service for our member cafe for refreshments and fellowship, and back here in this chapel at 5:15 for a service of Holy Communion tonight. Live without fear. Your God has created you, holy, has always cared for you, and loves you as a mother. So follow the good road and may a blessing of God Almighty be with you this day and always, amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.