

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to the Upton Chapel here in the Memorial Church on this feast of All Saints' for our daily service of morning prayer. I invite you please to rise and join in saying our responsorial Psalm, which is number one in your psalter. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the council 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 likely 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:

This is a reading from the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, beginning at the first verse. When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak and he taught them, saying, "Blessed of the poor and spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called Children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account, rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Here ends the lesson. Today is one of the great feasts in the calendar of the church year. Not a feast of a single saint, who I might talk to you about, but the feast of All Saints', this day otherwise known to my children and most of us as the day after Halloween. Christians have been remembering saints and celebrating saints, remembering the dead since very early in the history of Christian life. In fact, it's sort of a three-day celebration. Halloween. All Hallows' Day, today, and then tomorrow, All Souls' Day, a three-day celebration in remembrance of the dead. In the early church, it was different, I guess is one way to say it. I said we've been celebrating saints, but what a saint is and has been to the church has changed a lot in the past 2,000 years. Most of the early commemorations were for the martyrs; people who had been killed for their faith, but early on the word saint was a word applied to more than just the martyrs. The word which we translate now into English as saint just meant holy.

And so they'd say, Holy Jim or Holy Nancy. Folks that they remembered, folks who were dead, who they knew were in the embrace of God, they would just call holy. This holy person. Like everything else in our tradition. Over time, over centuries, these things became institutionalized and not just anybody who you remember, who you might call holy, would be called a saint. Now, there's a... In the Roman Catholic Church, which observes the cult of saints more faithfully perhaps than any other denomination, there's a thing called the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. You have to make application to the Dicastery to have a saint approved. Among other things, you have to show proof of two posthumous important miracles. Important miracles by the way, not just any miracles, in order to receive sainthood. And sainthood is the last in a long progression of statuses that you can have. The first is you're called venerable and the second is blessed.

In fact, tomorrow's holiday, All Souls', kind of split off from All Saints' for the rest of us sinners who are never venerable or blessed or saints. I think this use of the word blessed is a step towards sainthood. It's just a sign of how this has become institutionalized. Also interesting that the gospel passage, a sign for All Saints' Day is this one from the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus tells us who is blessed. Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the those who mourn, blessed are the meek. These famous lines, some of the most famous of Jesus' teaching, the word translated as blessed here means it's Makarios. In Greek, it means happy or lucky. This is actually a rhetorical trick in his speech. He's trying to get his listeners' attention because he's saying nonsensical things like, "How lucky are those who are poor in spirit? How lucky are the meek? How happy are they?"

And it does get our attention, maybe most cruelly in that one line, "Blessed are those who mourn." How happy are those who mourn? That doesn't make sense. A year ago right now, my mom had just bought a new outfit to come to church for All Saints' Day. And she never came to church for All Saints' Day. And I've talked about these things before and I don't need to restate them now, but even then, and also of course today, even in my mourning and continued grief, what a blessing it was to have my mom. The thing about this passage from the Gospel of Matthew is that all these things are just different ways of saying blessed are those who love. I think I've said that before from this pulpit. You can't mourn anybody unless you've loved and been loved. You can't hunger and thirst for righteousness unless you love someone who is suffering unjustly. You can't work for peace unless you love your enemy.

What Jesus is doing is just meditating upon a theme. Blessed are those who love. Love is what we're blessed with and what blesses us, and we shouldn't be surprised by that because God is love. And if God is love, then maybe we need to rethink our whole idea of what blessing is, what saintliness is, and turn it away from some fantasy of human purity that none of us achieve, that I spend so many mornings telling you that all the saints have not achieved. Turning away from blessing is a fantasy of human purity and towards blessing as the fact and the gift, and sometimes the sadness and the grief of love. The English word blessing comes from an old French word that means bloodied. Even though the word here in Greek is happy or lucky, I like the English word, blessing.

Today is the feast of All Saints'. For all those saints we remember in our hearts, not just the miracle workers and the martyrs, all the saints. All those we remember with love. To love and be loved, this is what holiness is. I think maybe it's what happiness is too, even when happiness is mired in tears. Today, we pray for all the saints. May their memory be a blessing. Please rise for the prayers. The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your son Christ our Lord. Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns one God in glory everlasting, amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

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 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. Please join in singing our concluding hymn, number 84.

Choir/Congregation:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

If you can, please join us down in the undercroft for refreshments after this service. And also please remember that during the month of November, we are collecting infant clothes, age three months to one year, for the Kisoro Children's Foundation in Kisoro, Uganda for women and children there. Please bring some baby clothes to morning prayers sometime this month if you can. Now 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 in Christ Jesus forever and ever, amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

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Thanks be to God. (singing)