

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 our responsorial Psalm, which is number 12. Help, Lord; for there is no longer any that is godly; for the faithful have vanished from among the sons of men.

Congregation:

Every one utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts.

Congregation:

Those who say, "With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is our master?"

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan, I will now arise," says the Lord; "I will place him in the safety for which he longs."

Congregation:

The promises of the Lord are promises that are pure, silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Do thou, O Lord, protect us, guard us ever from this generation.

Congregation:

On every side the wicked prowl, as vileness is exalted among the sons of men.

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 24th chapter of the Gospel of Luke, beginning at the 13th verse. "Now, on that same day, two of the disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and

broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight." Here ends the lesson.

I said last week Wednesday that there is no saint observed on the Wednesday of Holy Week, there was also no saint observed on the Wednesday after Easter. This is a special week in the church calendar. The 50 days of Easter are considered a Sabbath season. Out of the 365 days of the year, about a seventh of the year is Easter, and this first week of Easter is a seventh of the season of Easter. So it's a special week, no saints. However, the saint we would've observed on April 3rd is Mary of Egypt, and I want to say a word about her in order to unpack the lesson about Emmaus that we have today for the Wednesday after Easter. The lesson begins now on that same day too; we're going to a village, that day is Easter morning. These disciples are leaving Jerusalem, most probably because they're afraid.

And then you heard the story of what happened on that road. So who is Mary of Egypt? We're not sure; her history is very hazy, possibly entirely legendary. She was first written about in the mid-seventh century. If she lived, she probably lived in the fourth or fifth century. She was a grazer saint of the Transjordan desert and considered one of the desert mothers. A grazer saint was a person who ate only raw plants and usually moved about on all fours in order to gather their food. In this, they were similar to the Dendrites, who were saints, who did similar things but lived in trees. The variety of sainthood is vast. I'll say more about that in a minute.

She was born somewhere in Egypt. According to the story, she ran away to Alexandria. She was probably a sex worker. The hagiographies say that she never received payment because her lust was insatiable; who knows? We know that this was part of her life. She also begged and spun flax; she took what she called, what others called an anti-pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Lots of people were taking pilgrimages to Jerusalem. She wisely expected that there would be many people on the road to Jerusalem who would use her services, and so she accompanied the pilgrims to Jerusalem.

When in Jerusalem, she tried to enter the church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Jesus is meant to have been buried, and she was stopped by some unseen force at the threshold. She turned aside, repented, and then was allowed to enter. When she was inside the church, a voice spoke to her and told her to go east into the desert. And so she did. On her way, she stopped at a monastery on the banks of the Jordan, where she received absolution and a blessing. They gave her three loaves of bread. She took those three loaves of bread in the desert, and when they were gone, she ate what she could find. Later, a holy man named Zosimas of Palestine met her in the desert. It was a customary at the time for monks to go out into the desert during Lent for 40 days. And so he did this, and he met Mary when he was in the desert. She was naked. The legends say that she was barely recognizable as human.

She asked Zosimas to bring her communion the next year on Maundy Thursday. And so he did. And on the banks of the Jordan, he met her again, gave her communion. He asked her to come again. The third year, Zosimas traveled to see her, but when in the desert found her dead. With an inscription in the sand by her head, which said that she had in fact died the same night that she had received communion from him the year before, and her body had been preserved and transported to the place where Zosimas found her. So that's Mary.

This Emmaus story, the story of these two disciples on resurrection morning. There are several things we might say about it, but one of the things that we can say about it is what is so essential to this story is that Jesus is not recognizable to them. They only recognize him for an instant, and then he vanishes. Jesus is the stranger, the one they cannot recognize, and the one who disappears. What this says to us, I think what it implies is that it is not going to be among the familiar that we will find Christ. Finding Jesus and seeing Jesus will always be a surprise. It will always defy our expectations. And this has, or should have, some repercussions for what we recognize as holiness.

In other words, as I think Mary might show us, holiness might, by definition, confound our expectations. It doesn't look like this; it looks like that. And I could be more pointed; maybe it doesn't look like this; it looks like that. The sheer difference and diversity of human experience of human being, that difference can be regarded itself as a sign of God's goodness, can be regarded itself as a sign of holiness. What a shame that, for so much of Christian history, human diversity has instead been a sign or cause for our condemnation. I was blissfully unaware over the weekend of the whole brouhaha in some media outlets over the White House recognizing Trans Visibility Day on Easter morning.

What a perfect thing to do on Easter morning to make visible those whose lives and bodies, and experiences are holy. What an echo of the Emmaus story, to see Christ in those who have not been seen, who have been made invisible. Mary comes to us, Mary of Egypt comes to us as so utterly different, such an unlikely saint that we might see difference as itself a sign of saintliness, that we might see the unfamiliar, in other words, the stranger in all their perceived strangeness that we might see them as holy, that is crucial to the Easter message.

And so may this story of the Disciples on the way to Emmaus and may Mary of Egypt help us to recognize the worth of all the lives which surround us in all their good diversity. And may they help us honor them in their difference as glorious signs of holiness. Please rise for the prayers. Let us pray.

Oh God, whose blessed son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread. Open the eyes of our faith that we may behold Him in all his redeeming work who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

And let's pray the prayer Jesus taught us, saying:

The Rev and 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, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

I invite you, please, to join in singing our concluding hymn, number 176.

Congregation:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

I have a few short announcements for you this morning. First, I wanted to tell you that I was in touch with Claudine yesterday. I corresponded with her. Everyone is okay; she made a point to say thank you for your calm and care yesterday. I want to thank you for all your calm and your care yesterday, especially to Calvin and Steph, and Ari, who... And others I wasn't here, others who helped. You responded well, and it was received most gratefully by Claudine and Chris. The second announcement is we will resume our communion services tonight. I just talked about Emmaus and the breaking of bread. If you want to break bread with us this evening, we will do so at 5:15 here in the chapel and also downstairs in a couple of minutes for MemCafé. Now, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you this day and always. Amen.

Congregation:

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Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thank you Jesus, God.