

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome back to our daily service of Morning Prayers here in the Appleton Chapel of our Memorial Church. It's good to be with you again this term. I invite you please to rise and join in saying our Responsorial Psalm, which is number 119. Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.

Congregation:

Happy are those who keep His decrees, who seek Him with their whole heart.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Who also do no wrong, but walk in His ways.

Congregation:

You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

O, that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!

Congregation:

Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let my cry come before You, O Lord; give me understanding according to Your word.

Congregation:

Let my supplication come before you; deliver me according to Your promise.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

My lips will pour forth praise, because you teach me your statutes.

Congregation:

My tongue will speak of your promise, for all your commandments are righteousness.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.

Congregation:

I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let me live that I may praise you; and let your ordinances help me.

Congregation:

I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

(singing)

This is a reading from the 24th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, beginning at the 24th verse.

"For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead you astray, if possible, even the elect. Take note, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, 'Look! He is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look! He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." Here ends the lesson.

These Wednesdays with you, I like to talk about the saints. Originally people were made saints only by local acclamation. The folks in a particular area would remember a person as holy and so they'd start calling that person holy in memory, Holy George or Holy Susan or whatever. And if this is true, it is true, a saint, the Episcopal Church remembers today is one who our locality acclaimed in his life and in his death. It's actually yesterday's feast day, but I thought it'd be good for today. Yesterday was the feast day of Phillips Brooks, the greatest American preacher of the 19th century and friend and son of this college.

His beginnings were not as auspicious as the rest of his life proved to be. After leaving Harvard College, he taught at Boston Latin where he was fired. After being fired from his teaching position, he wrote, "I do not know what will become of me and I do not much care." He was in kind of a low place. He said, "I wish I were 15 years old again. I believe I might become a stunning man, but somehow or other I do not seem in the way to come to very much now." Having decided that he would not come to much, he later resolved to become a priest. In fact, he said when he decided to become a priest that his only ambition was to be a parish priest and it wasn't a refuge for someone who was unsuccessful in teaching. He said, "To be a parish priest and know not much of one, I would as a college president still be less."

He was an overseer of this university and he preached here often. He famously, in the year 1881 declined the position I now hold, preacher to the university and Plummer Professor. Instead, he went to pastor Trinity Church in Copley Square. I'm not sure rector of Trinity Church is a humble parish priest, but that's what he did. He became widely and well-known across the country. Collections of his sermons were published as best-selling volumes, the first in 1878, more throughout the '80s into the 1890s and after his death. He wrote the lyrics to the Christmas Carol, O Little Town of Bethlehem. In 1891, he was elected Bishop of Massachusetts and consecrated Bishop at Trinity Church. He died 15 months later. At his funeral, Harvard students carried his body on their shoulders through the streets of Boston and mourners from denominations that accounted one another mutually heretical all joined in remembering him at his funeral. Roman Catholics, Congregationalists, Unitarians, they all gathered and acclaimed him a holy man. Holy Phillip, Saint Phillip.

As I said, he was best known for his preaching, but ask the average Harvard College student about Phillips Brooks and they will probably not know his sermons. They will tell you about Phillips Brooks House, which was built in 1900, seven years after Brooks' death and dedicated to the virtues of piety,

charity and hospitality. The Phillips Brooks House originally housed a social service committee, which then four years after its building became the Phillips Brooks House Association. The Phillips Brooks House Association ceased to operate as an official religious organization in the '20s, but then and now of course is still the home to many of our students' social service and social justice activities.

In this Gospel passage, Jesus warns us against false prophets and it's a good warning. Think of all the harm that has been done by folks who claim to have done it with Jesus's authority. And I think we're right to be wary of seeing Jesus where he is not. Jesus tells us not to do this and to be aware of false prophets who tell us where to look. But this passage, which comes from 24 is only meaningfully read alongside the chapter which comes after it, chapter 25, where Jesus says, "You will find me in the least among you." It's not just beware of those who tell you to see me in the wilderness or see me in the rooms. He also says, "I'm going to tell you where I am, which is actually among the least. That is where you will find me."

Phillips Brooks is most notably remembered as a preacher of the Christian Gospel in some circles. It's why his name is on the pulpit in this church, even though he never stepped foot in that pulpit or in this church, it was built 40 years after his death. But the fact that his memory, despite all that good preaching, the fact that his memory is most prominently preserved in service to the poor and needy of this community, the community he chose to serve himself, the community to which he dedicated his professional life, the community on behalf of which he declined, all the honors and privileges of this institution, honors and privileges, I should say, not all of us are able to resist. The service to the poor remains the most apt testimony of his lifelong commitment to the Christian good news. Please rise for the prayers.

The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

The Lord be with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray.

Everlasting God, who implants your living word in the minds and on the lips of all who proclaim your truth, grant that we like your pastor and preacher Phillips Brooks might proclaim your Gospel in our own generation with grace and power through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And let us 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 me in singing hymn number 3, Let the Whole Creation Cry.

(singing)

This transcript was exported on Jan 24, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

MemCafe will begin next week as will our weekly service of Holy Communion on Wednesday evening here in this chapel. I hope to see you there. Glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine and 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:

Bless God.