

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 for our responsorial reading this morning, which is a passage from the Book of the Prophet Micah and is numbered 155 in your psalter.

"In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised up above the hills."

Congregation :

"People shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob.'"

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"That He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths."

Congregation :

"For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"He shall judge between many peoples and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away."

Congregation :

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

Congregation :

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?"

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?"

Congregation :

"Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?"

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

Congregation :

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 12th chapter of the Gospel of Mark, beginning at the 41st verse.

"Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then He called His disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'"

Here ends the lesson. Today is the feast day in the Episcopal Church calendar of Marcella of Rome, a noble woman from the Aventine Hill in Rome who eventually gave up all her wealth in service to the poor, which is why the passage that I just read is a sign for her feast day. She lived in the fourth century, was born in 325, died in 410. Her husband died after an early marriage. They were married only seven months. He died young. And though, she had many suitors because she came from a wealthy family, she decided instead to dedicate her life to prayer and to charity. In particular, she had the desert fathers in mind. This group of ascetics and monks in the Christian east, who lived their life in prayer, and she wanted to try to imitate that in the urban setting of Rome.

Last fall, I'm sure you remember, I spoke about Saint Jerome on one of these Wednesdays. And I spoke about how he developed a community of wealthy women from Rome, and Marcella was one of this community in the fourth century. She was in the same circle. She and her mother, Albina, had a palatial home on the Aventine Hill, and they decided to dedicate it to this community. In that home, they established an informal or unofficial order, a monastic order of women, who modeled their lives on the monks of the east. It's unofficial because at this time, there was no official institutionalization of this kind of life.

Today in Rome, the Basilica of Santa Sabina is near the location of this home. They dedicated to this house... Excuse me. They dedicated this house as a place of hospitality to pilgrims coming to Rome and to the poor. They served anyone who would come to the home. Jerome and some of those wealthy women decided to leave for the Holy Land and start a community there. And she was invited to go with Jerome to this new monastic community in Jerusalem, but she declined. She said her community in Rome was too important, and the poor who visited her needed their support.

Shortly after this, the Visigoths invaded Rome in 410. Because she lived in a large palatial estate, they assumed that she had great wealth. She did not. She had given it all away by this time. But because they assumed she had great wealth, they believed her to be hiding it from them, and so they scorched her and tortured her and beat her with cudgels. Some other of the Visigothic soldiers took pity upon her and took her to a church that the Visigothic king had set apart for sanctuary, and she died there of her wounds. Jerome, hearing about this in Jerusalem, wrote a memorial letter to her community, remembering her and her holiness. One of the things he said marked her holiness, and I love this. One of the things he said marked her holiness is that whenever they would discuss scripture together, she would always argue with him and dispute all his interpretations.

This is a famous passage from the Gospel of Mark, this basic teaching about the wealthy person who gives a lot and the widow who doesn't give much, and there's a sense of proportionality to this teaching, a thousand dollars doesn't mean the same thing to a billionaire and a poor person. And so it's not the same kind of gift, and Jesus is right to teach this, but there's a risk to it also. We know that His teaching

has been used by Christian evangelists throughout history to separate the poor from their money. So I'm not encouraging it necessarily as a fundraising strategy. This church, for example, has plenty of money, and I would rather the poor keep their money than give it to us. What this lesson can do, however, I think, is help us calibrate our gratitude, especially as we hear news reports each day of extremely wealthy donors to this university who give hundreds of millions of dollars that they don't even feel because they're billionaires, threatening to withhold those gifts.

A lesson like this might help us draw our attention to the many gifts of the many people who make this university and this community what it is. I told a story last fall, if you come to church on Sunday mornings about how, when Danny's in the car or Danny's walking through the square with me or Colette and he sees a person who's panhandling and asking for money, he always wants to give. And so now, we've made a habit of keeping small bills on ourselves at all times, so we have something to give. After I told that story, some very kind person in this congregation gave Danny a big, fat stack of \$1 bills. Over the Christmas holidays, the kids wanted to go out for ice cream. It's cold. But they wanted ice cream, so we went out for ice cream to J.P. Licks in the square.

And Danny grabbed \$4 bills out of that pack, and he gave \$2 to one person and \$2 to another person. And then somebody on the street saw him giving away these dollars and gave him \$5 for giving away 4. And Danny didn't think that was all right, so he gave the 5 to somebody else asking for money in the square. I was talking to Danny about it afterwards, and he said that his favorite thing about giving away the money is that whenever he does, whoever he gives the money to always says to him, "God bless you." And he said to me, "They have something to give me. They always have something to give me back. They give me that. Isn't that great?"

One could describe Marcella's ministry in Rome as a ministry dedicated to giving to those who cannot give back and went holy for that reason. We give not so we can receive in return, but because it's worth giving. But there might even be a deeper holiness than that, a deeper holiness which recognizes that what the poor have to give us in return is their blessing, that they in fact are the gift themselves. What Jesus and Marcella both know, and what may be Danny does too, is that however much we give when we see the person in front of us as a gift, we have always received more than fair compensation. I invite you please to rise for the prayers. The Lord be with you.

Congregation :

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Oh, God, who satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry with good things, grant that we, like your servant, Marcella, may hunger and thirst after you above the vain pomp and glory of this world, and delight in your Word above all manner of riches through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and 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, for ever and ever.
Amen. Please join in singing our closing hymn number 230.

Congregation :
(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please join us in the undercroft downstairs after the service for Mem Cafe, and this evening at 5:15 in this chapel for the service of Holy Communion.

And now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all this day and forever. Amen.

Congregation :
Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation :
Thanks be to God.