

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning. Welcome to the Appleton Chapel here in our memorial church for our daily service of morning prayers. I invite you please to rise and join in, sing our responsorial Psalm, which is number 136 in your [inaudible 00:02:29]. Oh, give thanks unto the Lord for he is good, for his mercy endureth forever.

congregation:

Oh, give thanks unto God of gods, for his mercy forever.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Oh, give thanks to the Lord of Lords, for his mercy endureth forever.

congregation:

To him alone doeth great wonders, for his mercy endureth forever.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

To him that by wisdom made the heavens, for his mercy endureth forever.

congregation:

To him that stretched out the earth above the waters, for his mercy endureth forever.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

To him that made great lights, for his mercy endureth forever.

congregation:

The sun to rule by day, for his mercy endureth forever.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

The moon and stars to rule by night, for his mercy endureth forever.

congregation:

And redeemed us from our enemies, for his mercy endureth forever.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Who giveth food to all flesh, for his mercy endureth forever.

congregation:

Oh, give thanks unto the God of heaven, for his mercy endureth forever. (Singing).

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 13th chapter of the Gospel of John, beginning at the 21st verse. After saying this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples, the one whom

Jesus loved was reclining next to him. Simon Peter, therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking.

So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped a piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. After Judas received a piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." Here ends the lesson in the Episcopal Church calendar during Holy Week, we do not remember [inaudible 00:06:43].

Each day of Holy Week has its own readings, and so this gospel lesson this morning is the lesson for the Wednesday of Holy Week. But in any other year, the 27th of March is the Feast of Charles Henry Brent, an early 20th century American bishop and missionary. And because his story illuminates, I think, this lesson from the gospel of John, I'm going to talk about him.

I said he was American, he was North American, born in Ontario. He went to university at Trinity College in Toronto. He was ordained a deacon in the diocese there, but there were no positions for priests in Ontario. And so we moved to the United States, moved to the Diocese of Western New York and became a priest in Buffalo. He lived the rest of his life in the United States. After Buffalo, he came to Cambridge to the College Fathers, the Society of St. John, the Evangelist near the river here and lived with them for a while.

They placed him at St. Augustine's Church in Boston, which is an African American Episcopal congregation in Boston. He then became a minister at St. Stephens in the South End. While in Boston, he became close to the Social Gospel Movement, especially to William Dwight Porter Bliss and [inaudible 00:08:06], important figures in the social gospel and Christian socialism in the early 20th century and late 19th century.

He had appointments ready for him at the University of the South and the General Theological Seminary, and he was trying to decide which place he should go when the Episcopal Church elected him missionary bishop of the Philippines. The Spanish-American War had just concluded and the Philippines had become a colony, a territory of the United States. William McKinley president at the time thought that Filipinos were unfit to rule themselves and that Catholics as heretics were unfit to rule them, and decided that good American Protestants ought to.

And the Episcopal Church in its agreement made Charles Henry Brent Bishop of the Philippines. He got the news at lunch with his friends and he took out an atlas to see where the Philippines were. Brent went and as he went, he said, he wrote that his aim was to westernize the Filipinos in order to make them good Christians. We can see even in this statement how religion and racism go together, that the idea of being a good Christian was tied to becoming Western. He was very influential and successful there, depending on how one defines success, and he became the most widely known clergyman in the United States in this period after the death of Phillips Brooks.

After serving in the Philippines, he became chief chaplain of the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I. He was basically the head chaplain of American forces in World War I, and then was the founding member and president of the World Council of Churches. He's a very influential clergyman, as I said, but we cringe at least, at least when we hear the way he described what he thought his work was in the Philippines. As I said, it's offensive and racist and we can and ought to call it that even as we remember him today. We certainly would not sanctify or crown or celebrate those opinions.

He also learned something in the Philippines, I think. Maybe learned about the limits of his theology. When he arrived there, unlike McKinley, he found it nonsensical to try to convert Roman Catholics. Most of the Filipinos in Manila were Roman Catholic, and he found it nonsensical to try to convert Catholics. And so he actually spent most of his energy serving them and trying to meet their material needs,

building schools, feeding them, not trying to evangelize or westernize them. He found the same was true in the Southern Philippines, which is mostly Muslim. He began attempting to convert them, found them utterly resistant to the attempts, and so he stopped trying and just built hospitals and tried to build the first hospitals in Southern Philippines in fact, and tried to provide for their medical and physical welfare.

I think Charles Henry Brent was always fundamentally conceptually in the wrong in his missionary activities in the Philippines. I think we have to say that. I think we can also say that he did some good, he fed people, built hospitals, cared for them in their need. And this is why I thought it worthwhile to talk about Charles Henry Brent when our gospel lesson for this Wednesday of Holy Week is a story about betrayal. The single and dramatic moment of betrayal in this gospel lesson is, of course, Judas's betrayal of Jesus. But the danger of focusing too much upon Judas is that Judas was not the only one, of course, who betrayed Jesus.

All the disciples let him down. All the disciples turned away from him. All the disciples had it wrong, had the wrong idea of who he was and what his ministry meant. There are decrees of betrayal, and every one of these friends of Jesus betrayed him this week, that's one of the things that we reflect upon as Christians this holy week. All of them let him down just as Charles Henry Brent let the church and let God, and let the people he meant to serve down.

And yet despite their failures, the disciples' failures, Brent's failures, some good was done in and through them nonetheless. Part of our faith, I think, our faith in the Holy Spirit is a faith that we can be fully human. That is that we can be fully fallible, and still through our efforts some way, bless the world. In the Psalm we read this morning, we said over and over again, his mercy endureth forever, his mercy endureth forever, his mercy endureth forever. And maybe one way we could think about what mercy is to say that even when we are at our worst, God somehow makes some good come of what we do.

Part of the spiritual task of this in every Holy Week is to confront our own failures, the ways we too betray God and neighbor each day, the way we too participate in the institutions, the systems of power and injustice that figures like Charles Henry Brent did. As we do that this week, let us not lose faith in the power of God, to work out the plan of his salvation through the fallible acts and clumsy betrayals of the broken human beings he loved enough to die for. I invite you, please to rise for the prayers. The Lord be with you.

congregation:

[inaudible 00:14:25].

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, who did stretch out thine arms of love on the hard wood of the cross, that everyone might come within the reach of thy saving embrace, so clothe us in thy spirit that we reaching forth our hands in love may bring those who do not know thee to the knowledge and love of thee, for the honor of thy name. Amen.

congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And now that is pray of 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 stay 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 155.

congregation:

(Singing).

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Due to a previously scheduled event here at the church tonight, we will not have our service of Holy Communion this evening. But please join us tomorrow for our morning Thursday service, Friday for our noon service for Good Friday, and then on Easter morning. Of course, and also downstairs immediately after this service for [inaudible 00:18:43]. May the peace 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:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

congregation:

[inaudible 00:18:52].