

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

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 saying our responsorial psalm, which is number 78 in your Black Psalter.

"Give ear, O my people, to my teaching. Turn your ear to what I say."

Congregation:

"I will expound a theme. Hold forth on the lessons of the past."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Things we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us."

Congregation:

"We will not withhold them from their children, telling the coming generation the praises of the Lord and His might, and the wonders He performed."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"He established a decree in Jacob, ordained a teaching in Israel, charging our fathers to make them known to their children."

Congregation:

"That a future generation might know, children yet to be born, and in their turn tell their children."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"That they might put their confidence in God, and not forget God's great deeds, but observe His commandments."

Congregation:

"And not be like their fathers, a wayward and defiant generation, a generation whose heart was inconstant, whose spirit was not true to God."

MUSIC:

Sometimes the mist overhangs my path.

Overhangs my path.

And blackening clouds about me cling.

But, oh, I have, I have, I have a magic way.

To turn the gloom to cheerful day.
I softly, softly sing.
And if the way grows darker still.
Shadowed by sorrow's somber wing.
With glad defiance in my throat.
I pierce, pierce the darkness with a note.
And sing, and sing, and sing.
I brood not over the broken past.
Nor dread whatever time may bring.
No nights are dark, no days are long.
While in my heart there swells a song.
And I can sing.
I can sing.
And I can sing.
I can sing.
And I can sing.
I can sing.
And I can sing.
I can sing.
I sing.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 15th chapter of the Gospel of John, beginning at the 18th verse. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also." Here ends the lesson.

Today's the feast day of three English martyrs, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and Thomas Cranmer, all martyrs of the English Reformation under the reign of Queen Mary I. Mary was Henry VIII's daughter. Henry VIII left the church, the English Church, in some amount of chaos at the end of his reign. His reasons for breaking with Rome were both personal and political. People know his personal reasons; he wanted divorce so he could marry Anne Boleyn. But they were political also. His first wife, Catherine, was the aunt of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles I. Charles had the Papal states under siege and the Pope in prison just shortly before Henry went to the Pope asking for a divorce, and the Pope did not grant him one for that reason.

When the break happened and the English Church broke away and the divorce happened, several Protestant clergy in the English Church saw an opportunity to make some resistance, to make this political crisis into a theological opportunity. And when Henry's son Edward took the throne, a lot of changes were made in the English Church, to the English liturgy primarily. In 1549, the first English missal and prayer book was published. Edward died very soon, and Mary became queen.

Her strategy in foreign affairs was to become the ally of the Holy Roman Emperor. She married Charles's son. The vision was of one unified Holy Roman Empire throughout Europe. Her strategy in domestic affairs was to suppress Protestantism with violence. In her brief five-year reign, she burned nearly 300 Protestants alive, banished dozens more. And Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and Thomas Cranmer are three of the men she burned. Latimer and Ridley died together this day in 1555, Cranmer died in March of 1556.

Cranmer was Archbishop of Canterbury, who granted Henry his divorce. He also wrote the Book of Common Prayer, or was in charge of writing it. His death was delayed because he wrote a letter of submission to the Pope. In the end, Queen Mary did not believe he was sincere, and burned him anyway. He felt guilty about this. Foxe's Book of Martyrs says that he felt so guilty that he took the hand that signed the letter of submission and put it in the fire first to burn before the rest of his body burned. Ridley was the chaplain of Henry VIII, and later Bishop of Rochester. He helped write the prayer book, and Latimer was a famous preacher, Bishop of Worcester. When they were about to light the fire under Latimer and Ridley, Latimer is meant to have said, "Be of good cheer, Master Ridley, and play the man! for we shall this day light such a candle in England, as I trust, by God's grace, shall never be put out."

Last week, after this talk, I talked about Robert Grosseteste and the founding of European science, and also anti-Semitism, and I went downstairs, and before another meeting, I had about 20 minutes. And so I do what I all so often do when I have about 20 minutes, is I open The New York Times and read. And I saw an article there that maybe some of you saw, which was written by a volunteer healthcare worker in Gaza, which was truly horrifying. He also surveyed about 60 other volunteer healthcare workers who had been in Gaza in the time of war. And it was horrifying, the utter and absolute suffering of children, especially in this war. I think it's fair to say, nearly unprecedented suffering of children in this war.

I want to be clear: we Christians, in the Middle Ages, started a myth called the blood libel myth, where we invented lies that Jewish people murdered gentile children. We can recognize the terrible history of that myth, while also refusing to look past the suffering of Palestinian children today, because their suffering is as real as the blood libel myth is false. And because it is real, and because those healthcare workers spoke about it, that article has been haunting me all week. And indeed it haunted me when I was reading about Latimer and Ridley and Cranmer, and preparing these remarks. And it made me think of two things.

The first thing it made me think of was Queen Mary's attempt to suppress turmoil and chaos with violence and destruction. To be clear, Henry VIII and the Protestant ministers who took advantage of his political crisis were cruel and murderous too. But her response to them was to burn it all away, quite literally, to try to destroy them absolutely. And all it did was to increase and amplify the suffering and the conflict. It was both a moral and a political error.

The second thing this article had me thinking, when I was preparing these remarks, was more desperate and desolating. One of the details from this article was how thoroughly children in Gaza have dissociated. They don't cry, they just beg for death. They see no meaning in their lives or their death. And indeed, why should they? The world all around them does everything it can to convince them that their lives are meaningless. Any death suffered because of one's identity is cruel and awful. But Latimer and Ridley and Cranmer at least had the grace to believe that their death had some meaning, as Latimer's famous final words speak to. What a cruel torture it is, to believe that your death has no meaning, that your life has no meaning. The children who die today believe their lives and deaths have no meaning. I fear they will be proven correct, until and unless we, who witness their dying from afar, begin to insist otherwise.

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. Keep us, O Lord, constant in faith, and zealous in witness. That, like your servants Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and Thomas Cranmer, we may live in your fear, die in your favor, and rest in your peace. For the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, 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 now 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."

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:

Please join in singing our concluding hymn, number 230, O Thou Great Friend to All of Us Below.

MUSIC:

O thou great friend to all of us below.
Who once appeared in humblest guise on earth.
Sin to rebuke, to call us from our woe.
To break the captive's chain and bring new birth.
Thee would I sing: thy truth is still the light.
Which guides the nations groping on their way.
Stumbling and falling in disastrous night.
Yet hoping ever for the perfect day.
Yes, thou art still the life; thou art the way.
The holiest know light, life and way of heaven.
And they who dearest hope and deepest pray.
Toil by the truth, life, way that thou hast given.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please join us downstairs in the undercroft for refreshments and fellowship at MemCafe after this service. Now, may 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 forevermore. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.