

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 our Responsorial Psalm, which is number 51, in your black psalter.

Have mercy upon me, oh God, after thy great goodness. According to the multitude of thy mercies, do away mine offenses.

Congregation:

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

For I acknowledge my faults and my sin is ever before me.

Congregation:

Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified in my sin, and clear when thou shalt touch.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Thou shalt purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Thou shalt wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Congregation:

Thou shalt [inaudible 00:04:56].

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Turn thy face from my sins and put out all my misdeeds.

Congregation:

Make me a clean heart for God, and reveal thy spirit within me.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

Congregation:

[inaudible 00:05:21] and establish me with thy true spirit.

[inaudible 00:05:37]

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the 30th chapter of the book of the Prophet Job, beginning of the 26th verse. "But when I looked for good, evil came and when I waited for light, darkness came. My inward parts are in turmoil, and are never still. Days of affliction come to meet me. I go about in sunless gloom. I stand up in the assembly and cry for help. I am a brother of jackals, and a companion of ostriches. My skin turns black and falls from me and my bones burn with heat. My lyre is turned to mourning, and my pipe to the voice of those who weep." Here ends the lesson.

Today is the 23rd anniversary of 9/11. There is no saint assigned in the Episcopal Church calendar for today. I don't think that's on purpose, there wasn't one before 2001 and they haven't added one since. Typically, as some of you know, when there's no assigned saint, I either look for one in the Roman Catholic calendar or I look at the adjacent days. And there are some interesting ones on the 10th and the 12th, yesterday and tomorrow, but we'll save those for another year. Today seems a day that we ought to mark on its own and for its own sake.

My child Sammy's homework there in seventh grade, their homework last night was to come home and ask me what I remembered about 9/11. I think they were expecting a two-minute conversation, they like two-minute homework. And I just started talking and telling them about it, and as I talked, Danny came in, our youngest Danny came in to listen too. And told him about the beautiful day, the blue sky, not unlike today. I remember I was on the phone with a customer service rep when the first plane hit and the person said, "Oh my gosh." And the place I worked had a TV out in the front lobby and I went out there and turned on the TV, and the whole staff came and gathered around the TV, and we watched the towers fall, and we watched everything that happened. And I remember walking around, I worked at Notre Dame, walking around the campus. And the somberness and the quiet and the grief.

It ended up being 20 minutes, not two. But about two minutes in Sammy put their hand over their mouth like this and just listened. And then afterwards Danny crawled into bed next to me and cried. As I was talking, it occurred to me that I'm 47 now, and this was 23 years ago, and this event almost exactly bisects my life. I do have this feeling that nothing has been the same since. And I know that sounds like political pabulum, "9/11 changed everything." That's not what I mean. It just seems like to me, the 21st century has been a series of crises. And a series of them badly responded to. And by badly, I mean both poorly and cruelly.

In particular I also think of what I didn't add when I told Danny and Sammy the story of 9/11. I didn't say that in response to that awful event, those unconscionable acts, the terrible and merciless killings of innocent people in New York, in Washington, and Pennsylvania, 2,977 people. In response to those awful things we embarked our country, our nation embarked, upon what I regard as a totally misguided and retaliatory response. This led to over 400,000 civilian deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan. 400,000. And 4.5 million indirect deaths. A half a million people.

In saying that, I don't believe I do and I don't intend to erase the loss and the grief that surround the 2,977 people who died on 9/11. I don't intend and I don't believe I do, erase the suffering of their families by mentioning these other deaths today. On the contrary, I mention them because I think we do erase those 2,977 people if we convince ourselves somehow that they have been redeemed, by the needless death of 5 million other innocents.

On these mornings from the possible scripture options, I almost always, I have always selected a gospel passage. Today I chose Job, because Job feels appropriate. My favorite theologian, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams has an essay on the relationship between politics and religion, where he talks about Job. And he says, "Everything's taken from Job. Job is suffering abjectly. What is Job to say?" Williams says, "If he were just resigned to his suffering, that would be a betrayal. A betrayal of the promises God had made him. If he tried to explain away that suffering, it would be a

blasphemy. To say that God is something other than God is. What is left in his suffering, in his loss. What is left for Job to say?" And Williams says, "What remains is protest."

William says, "Protest is in fact a profound act of imagination." Because in order to say no to the world that is, we must be saying yes to a world that does not yet exist. We have to imagine it. But this no and this yes is important. It can't just be a contrary position, protest. It can't just say no to this world. It also has to say yes to the world it imagines, and it must embody the world that it imagines in the act of its protest. It must stand for what it hopes to see in the world to come, not just against what it sees in the world that is.

I went to school for a long time and it happens that for many of the years that all these people I just mentioned were dying, I was a student. And I didn't do much protesting, in fact, none of us did. I think I went to one rally in 2003. And I'm ashamed that we, that I, didn't do more. Today we remain mired in our fantasies of retaliation. Even as the offenses of the past 23 years remain unrepented, even as the dead of 23 years ago remain unredeemed. We have in this last year become accustomed to protest. Here at Harvard, among other places, I expect we will become even more accustomed to it this year.

In memory of all the needless violence of these past 23 years, on our soil and elsewhere, and in honor of all the dead, both remembered and unremembered. I pray our imaginations might expand, as our voices rise. 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. Most merciful God whose loving care extends to all the world, we remember this day, your children of many nations and many faiths whose lives were cut short by the fierce flames of anger and hatred on September 11th. And on dates after that. Console those who continue to suffer and grieve, and give them comfort and hope as they look to the future. Out of what we have endured give us the grace to examine our relationships with those who perceive us as the enemy, and show our leaders the way to use our power to serve the good of all, for the healing of the nations. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord, who in reconciling love was lifted up from the Earth, that he may draw all things to himself. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Now we pray the words Jesus taught us, saying, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be me thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it's 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 in our concluding hymn, number 29.

Congregation:

This is my [inaudible 00:19:00].

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please join us after the service in the undercroft [inaudible 00:20:46] cafe. And 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 evermore. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Praise be to God.