



*Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille
with Aix-en-Provence
and the Luberon*

*25th July 2021
8th Sunday after Trinity
St James the Apostle*

Reflection

The words of Jesus at the conclusion and climax of this morning's Gospel passage. *Matthew 20. 26 – 28: It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

As we plod through the Green weeks of the Sundays after Trinity, it comes as a welcome change to celebrate an important saint's day on a Sunday. So this morning we rejoice in the commemoration of the apostle Saint James the Great. And I am sure that all of us across our chaplaincy rejoice in the name day of our chaplain, Jamie.

But who was James the Apostle? Perhaps we should be clear about which James we are commemorating today. In the New Testament there are references to four people named James.

Among the apostles there is James the Less, or the Younger, the son of Alphaeus (Mark 3.18). We know nothing else about him and his feast day is with the Apostle Philip on the 1st of May. (Pip and Jim Day!!)

Then, throughout the New Testament we have numerous references to James, 'the Lord's brother', who along with St. Peter became an early leader of the Church in Jerusalem (Mark 6.3, Matthew 13.55, Acts 1.14, 12.17, 15.17, 1 Corinthians 15.7, Galatians 1.19 - 2.12). He was put to death by the Sanhedrin in 62 or 69AD. Some traditions claim James the Less and James 'the Lord's brother' to be one and the same person, but there is no real evidence for this.

Then we have the Letter of James. Some scholars have claimed this was written by James, 'the Lord's brother'. But the style and clarity of the Greek would suggest this to be unlikely from a Galilean. Also the letter begins, 'James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ', with no claim of a brotherly relationship. Apart from the opening verses to chapters one and two, there is no direct reference to make its teaching distinctively Christian. Because of this, Martin Luther called it an 'Epistle of Straw'. However, it offers high moral teaching and encouragement in the face of persecution and other challenges of life. To quote its opening exhortation, '*My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature, lacking in nothing.*' (James 1.2-4)

Perhaps keeping these words from the Letter of James in mind, we can move on to the Apostle, James the Great, whose feast we celebrate today.

He and his brother, John, were the sons of Zebedee, in the family fishing business. But along with Peter and Andrew, in the same trade, they left their commercial interests to answer the call from Jesus to become 'fishers of people.' Such was James and his brother's commitment to Jesus that he later gives them the nicknames Boanerges - Sons of Thunder. James obviously belonged to the inner circle of the disciples, as along with his brother John, and Peter, he was close to Jesus at some of the key moments of his ministry. He was there in that extraordinary and exhilarating moment on the mountain of the Transfiguration witnessing the heavenly glory of Jesus in conversations with Moses and Elijah. By contrast he was one of the trio close to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, no doubt sharing in the pain and despair of Jesus' agonising prayer. In earlier happier times, as we heard in the gospel reading at the end of June, James, with the other two, was called by Jesus to witness the raising of the daughter of Jairus. Finally, John's gospel records the sons of Zebedee being there when the risen Jesus appeared to some of the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. (John 21.)

But then we have the strange event in today's gospel reading. The mother of James and John, probably out of love and motherly concern for her sons, naturally, and on her knees asks Jesus to give her boys the highest ranks in his kingdom. Interestingly, Mark's earlier gospel records the two disciples making the request themselves. (Mark 10.35 - 45) And here in Matthew, Jesus seems to address the disciples rather than giving a direct response to their mother.

Jesus' response to James and John, their mother, to the other disciples, and to us, is to move on towards a new reality. Being with Jesus, and following him, means not a life of honour, power and authority. Rather it may well mean drinking a bitter cup of difficulty or suffering. From today's reading from Acts we heard how James was beheaded by Herod Agrippa 1 in 44AD, and Peter has a narrow, albeit temporary escape by only being arrested. The following verses tell of his miraculous escape. James, along with so many Christians, shares with Jesus in drinking from the cup of suffering.

To everyone Jesus says that seeking positions of authority and power is a dangerous road which can lead to corruption and tyranny. Rather in the Christian life, in and for the Kingdom of God's rule, we are called to a life of service. This will, at times, be costly. For some it may have an ultimate cost as it did for Jesus. Following him will, as the letter of James says, bring times of trial and testing and call for endurance.

Today we celebrate and give thanks for the life of the Apostle James the Great. We pray that the example of his life of commitment to the ministry of Jesus will encourage us in our life of faith. That it will be a life of humility and service, that brings about the fullness and wholeness of life that Jesus paid for as a ransom for all people on the cross.

And finally, we give thanks and pray for our own James among us, as our Chaplain Jamie commits his life to priestly service among us.

Amen.

Canon David Pickering