

ST JAMES THE APOSTLE 2014
SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
ACTS 11.27 MATTHEW 20.20



FIERY AGENT OF CHANGE...APOSTLE OF JESUS...MEET ST JAMES THE GREAT...FORMER FISHERMAN, SON OF ZEBEDEE AND SALOME, BROTHER OF JOHN, EYEWITNESS TO THE TRANSFIGURATION, AMONG THE FIRST OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES, MET AN EARLY DATH AT THE SWORD OF HEROD AGRIPPA...

The lives and deeds of the saints define what we are called to do and be. Today we focus on and give thanks for the life and example of St. James the Great...‘great’ NOT meaning smarter, taller, tougher, more important or better known...simply ‘older’...

All too often we are provided erroneous descriptions of saints as withering wallflowers bent on submissive self-martyrdom while posing for icons or pictures on holy cards! It would be hard to paint a less accurate picture of James...one of the BOANGERES...(Gk) “SONS OF THUNDER” as Jesus described James and his bother John.

James first appears in St Matthew’s Gospel...Jesus, walking along the Sea of Galilee, strikes up a conversation with some fishermen...partners in an affluent fishing business owned by Zebedee and sons James, John and two other brothers, Peter and Andrew. The discussion results is their leaving the fishing business...Jesus said, *“from now on you will help me catch people”*...they joined. What we don’t know is how Zebedee (left holding the net!) felt about this or how he explained the sudden exit...one can imagine his going home and telling Mrs Zebedee...you won’t believe what happened today!

We do know from the Gospel lesson just read that later Salome, mother of James and John came to Jesus and said... *“I need a favor...make them the most important and have them seated on each side of you”*...Jesus replies you don’t know what you’re asking for...this is not about being made special, looking pretty and becoming famous...it’s about really hard and difficult stuff. The other ten disciples confronted Jesus about the matter of special treatment for some...Jesus told them if someone wants to be great he must be a servant to everyone else...if they want to be first, then they must above everything else, first be a servant...*“I came here not to be waited upon, but to serve and to give my life to save people.”*

We don’t know heir response. We can imagine considerable unease about what they’d got themselves into...all of a sudden the fishing business may have looked a bit more attractive!

Think about what Jesus said to and about James...being special means really serving others.

James and his brother John were committed and fiery companions and supporters of Jesus. The character of these BOANGERES...sons of thunder, is startlingly illustrated (Lk 9.53) by their visit to a hostile Samaritan village; given a less than friendly reception. they hurried out of town...James and John said to Jesus *“Just call down a lightning strike and blow the place apart”*...Jesus said *Forget it...a waste of resources*...they went on to another village. Good advice for us too...there is more to accomplish than pointless battles that deplete resources.

James was the first of the apostles to be martyred...in 44AD Herod Agrippa became very fearful of the Church gaining strength in Jerusalem...he publicly murdered him. He was sure this would solve the ‘problem’ of emerging Christianity...please the crowd, bolster his standing.

It didn’t work...20 centuries later, thanks, in part, to the life and work of St James here we are...

It is tempting to now take total comfort in the fact that James lived 2000 years ago, the Church is well established and free to operate in a climate devoid of fear and deadly persecution...in fact, true in most parts of the world...

With alarming intensity, the same fate suffered by James is today threatened with increasing intensity very near the site of the murder of St James by the very same method. What...? you might reasonably demand, am I talking about. The distance from Jerusalem to Damascus (Syria) is only about 135 miles – San Mateo / Sacramento. Christians in Damascus are being told to abandon their faith or be killed with a sword. Indeed a chilling reality. Evil is at work this very day in Syria and Iraq.

What are we called to do...? This is not a call for the Church to enter into the domain of geopolitical partisan politics or launch a personal mission to a distant land. But it is a call to consider with enhanced seriousness that for which we corporately pray every Sunday...that God may help turn the hearts of evildoers in the troubled parts of the world so all may live in peace with their families. Suddenly the life and death of St James becomes current...no longer an abstraction of nearly 2000 years ago

We consider this as we work to be the same kind of servants Jesus told James he must become.

James was an ordinary sort of fellow...worked hard at his fishing business...captivated by what Jesus had to say...spent his life in the tough environment of the formation of Christianity. Here we are...2000 years later in the tough environment of evolved Christianity...called to be just like James. What kind of servants are WE committed to be...?

