

Sermon on the Feast of St. James
St. James Episcopal Church
San Francisco, California
July 23, 2006
by The Rev. Mary Moore Gaines

Jeremiah 45:1-5; Psalm 1; Acts 11:27-12:3; Matthew 20:20-28

Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom . . . And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers.

Yes, this is our James, and his pushy mother. It is true James and his brother John had been in from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. These sons of Zebedee responded to Jesus' call, "Follow me." They left their nets, their father, their livelihood and, with Peter and Andrew, were Jesus' first followers.

A funny thing happened the other day. A stellar crew of volunteers was cleaning up the front office. It is the only time in 25 years that this has happened. And a fabulous beginning they made. We are hoping for one more day. 25 years. 2 days? One of the items that surfaced from the files was my original Letter of Agreement with St. James as I began my work as Deacon in 1989. Another interesting item was a sermon I preached on St. James Day on July 26, 1998. I always preach on St. James Day and, on that cleaning day, I observed that the St. James Day sermon inevitably has a good deal of sameness – same patron saint, same biblical stories. What changes is that we as individuals and congregation relate to our patron Saint and the stories about him differently each year. Grounded in the former things, a new vision is always emerging.

First, here is the boilerplate about St. James, the glimpses we get from scripture that we remember every year on this, St. James Feast Day. Jesus nicknamed James and John *Boanagres*, which means *Sons of Thunder*, when they asked him to bring fire down from heaven and destroy an inhospitable Samaritan village. Jesus didn't do that. Still the story has always intrigued me. James knew about Jesus' power, and perhaps wasn't sure of the appropriate use of that power. Jesus taught them about that.

In Mark's Gospel (we read Matthew today) it was not their mother who pushed for top spots in the Kingdom for her sons. James and John asked Jesus themselves. They did not hesitate to put themselves forward. The power thing again. Jesus taught them that it wasn't about getting the power place at the table. In fact, what is important is that they came not to be served but to serve. James was martyred, killed by the sword of King Herod. The liturgical color is red to honor his martyrdom. For all of his bravado, James did indeed drink the cup that Jesus drank.

In the Church's liturgical year, July 25 is St. James' official day to be honored. We choose the Sunday closest for our own celebration. The Feast of St. James is a good time

to take stock, very briefly, of our ministry together here at St. James. Past, present and still to come.

The Past: The Congregation, established in 1890 in a store front on Clement Street, became a parish in 1895 and built this church in the early 1920's. It thrived until the '70's when it flagged badly. St. James revived in the 80's and 90's and has been going strong for the past 20 years. There were two Capital Campaigns in 10 years. The first was the Second Century Campaign in '88 to refurbish the exterior of the church, the parish hall and the garden, to bolt the foundation and install an elevator. The second was Renewal '95 in 1995 to renew the interior of the church.

The Present. We continue to be thankful for the renewal both campaigns made possible. The parish hall is bright and cheerful. The bolting of the foundation was completed a month before the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989. The elevator provides access to many who wouldn't be able to come to church or parish and community events. The church is beautiful with wonderfully flexible space. We celebrate communion gathered together around the holy table. St. James has no debt and has operated in the black for nearly all of the past 15 years. As most of you know only too well, the operating budget is funded largely by the annual giving of our members.

Our ministries are thriving, due to the excellent cooperation between our staff and volunteers. We have strong programs for children and youth. We have the best music program we've had for at least 25 years. Probably ever. Our worship is beautiful, thanks to the faithful work of the Altar Guild, the Flower Guild, the ushers and all our Sunday ministers. Pastoral care is facilitated by our prayer group, our Wednesday healing service, our corporate and private prayers and the strong friendships among us. Adult spiritual formation, Spiritual Growth for Grownups, has wonderful offerings throughout the year. Community service is a centerpiece of our ministry with the Preschool, the Community Learning Center, Martin de Porres, along with outreach events in which we participate all year, every year. The garden and the gardeners keep the outside beautiful and give us endless pleasure.

We are now three independent, interdependent partners. The Church is the founding partner. The St. James Preschool, begun by St. James Church in 1963, received its separate non-profit status in 2004. Our junior partner, the Community Learning Center (CLC), became a separate non-profit in 2005. Both the Preschool and the CLC continue to be programs of St. James Church. This is reflected in their Bylaws with a majority of their Board members also members of St. James Church.

We three partners are now engaged in another Capital Campaign. This one is called Building Hope, Building Community, Building Futures. I don't have to tell you about this one. You are the Leadership Gift, over \$1 million, to get the ball rolling to replace the two buildings on our 100 X 100 lot which are not the church. You did this while supporting the operating budget of the church with the largest total of gifts we've ever had. Over \$300,000. Your commitment to St. James has, and continues to be, stunning

and full of grace. We will continue to invite those who haven't yet participated to join the 83 individuals and families who already have.

The Future: We will pray and work hard together to achieve our goal of a new Community Center at St. James, to break ground in June, 2008 to move into our new building in June, 2009. Other priorities: 1st: We will prepare ourselves in the next several months to be a neighborhood center in the event of a disaster in our city. 2nd We will be more active in environmental issues, the preservation of the planet. 3rd Peace and justice in the world. New ways to pray and to work for peace with justice. 4th We will keep on keeping on the ministries we do, striving always for effectiveness and excellence.

In my sermon on St. James Day, 1998 I identified five priorities which still stand in 2006: Celebrate. Expand. Educate. Care. Administrate.

There is an ancient legend that James' bones were secretly disinterred, brought by boat from Jerusalem and buried in Spain, at Santiago de Compostela. Beginning in the Middle Ages and continuing today hundreds of thousands of pilgrims travel the pilgrim route, taking months and months, often on foot, to visit Santiago de Compostela to honor our patron James. Drawn to his commitment, his boldness, his power, his faithfulness.

May we at St. James, San Francisco, continue to hold James' memory close. He is our patron. Our example. Remember that all that we are and all that we have is God given. And like James, we are called not to be served but to serve in the name of Jesus the Christ. The opportunities are enormous, the risk is great and the rewards are even better.