

Sermon on the Celebration of our Patron Saint James
St. James Episcopal Church
San Francisco, California
July 27, 2008
by The Rev. Mary Moore Gaines

II Kings 4:42-44; Psalm 145:10-16; Acts 11:27-12:3; John 6:1-14

. . . . King Herod laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. - Acts 12:1

Today is the Celebration of our patron Saint James. I always preach on St. James Day. I have preached a lot of sermons on James, the son of Zebedee, brother of John, *the sons of thunder*. I've made a bold move this year, my last sermon on James, our bold patron. I didn't choose the gospel appointed – you remember the one about James and John trying to get the best places with Jesus in the Kingdom, the rest of the disciples grumbling about their obvious power play, and Jesus telling the brothers frankly, *you don't have the slightest idea what you are asking. Will you be able to drink the cup that I will drink?*

Instead, I chose the gospel story of the loaves and the fishes to join past with present. To join St. James Major, his stained glass window is on your right, to the feeding of the five thousand, the window on your left. Did you connect the crucifer this morning with the figure of Jesus central in the window?

First James our Patron, then the feeding of the five thousand and finally our life today as this people of St. James.

Even though James, along with all the other disciples, forsakes Jesus and flees when he is arrested, he and they do return. They experience his resurrection and then the wind of the Holy Spirit blowing through that house on Pentecost. The Spirit empowers James to be a kingdom bringer himself. It also sets him up for King Herod's sword. Ultimately, James does drink the cup that Jesus drank.

. . . . King Herod laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword.

Many of us know the story of James by heart . . . someone called my attention to the expression 'by heart' last week . . . it speaks for itself.

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 boat, their fishing nets, their father, their livelihood and, with Peter and Andrew, were Jesus' first followers.

Here is what we know 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*, because 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, even though he was confused about the appropriate use of that power. Jesus taught him about power.

Peter, James and John were Jesus' inner circle. They were with him when he healed Jairus's daughter, when her parents were sure that she was dead. They are with Jesus on the mountain when he is transfigured, his face shines and his raiment becomes dazzling white as he stands between Moses and Elijah. They are with him in the garden of Gethsemane when the soldiers come to arrest him and take him away to be tried, scourged, and finally crucified.

No doubt about it, the decision to follow Jesus changed their lives forever. Somehow they heard, saw, experienced something that was compelling enough to make them leave their old lives and go for it, this new thing. What do you suppose 'it' was? Whatever it was, their decision was more heart than head. They knew by heart . . .

James' three strongest qualities make him an excellent example for St. James today: He 'got' it and followed Jesus; he committed and stayed the course; he was bold.

Now the feeding of the five thousand. Many of you remember the fire next door in 2003 that literally melted our three stained glass windows above the organ. Once we cleaned up the mess, we formed a group to plan the replacement of the three windows. We chose the artist, Alan Dragge from Reflection Studios in Berkeley. Then the theme . . . Out of several options, the group chose the theme of abundance, the story of the loaves and the fishes, sometimes called the feeding of the five thousand . . .

Allan then made an unusual request. He asked us to find members willing to pose in biblical dress, to be photographed for the windows. Elia got busy sewing 'biblical dress.' Volunteers were gathered

including Ryszard, Andre and Taylor Pochron, Mary Balmana and David Jefferies, Ian and Kathleen Matthews and Sam and Leam Goff. The great day of the shoot turned out to be the hottest day of summer . . . the picture was taken in full sunshine in front of the church doors. The volunteers nearly expired in their heavy biblical clothes. Thank God, they stayed the course, survived.

The windows before us today are the result. This is a living piece of St. James history. It is a profound statement of faith for this St. James Church and for the world. When we share what we have with one another, there will indeed be abundance for all. In all that we do here we try to reject scarcity mentality and embrace abundance mentality. This makes all the difference.

Jesus asked Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat? . . . Philip answered him, "Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people." Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all . . .

You know the rest . . . they divide and divide and divide. Everyone is fed and there is plenty for all with twelve baskets of fragments left over. Abundance emerges from generosity. Like that boy, they, and we, have to be ready and willing to share what we have.

It is well known that it is impossible to get someone's attention away from food when they are hungry. Literally and metaphorically. The heart of our faith and our liturgy is a shared meal. When we are well fed at this holy table then we can turn our attention to the myriad possibilities before us, ways we can help bring in the kingdom of God on earth here and now, as individuals and as this community of St. James. A fitting reflection on this St. James Day, which in addition to the metaphorical meal, we celebrate with a picnic! We may not feed 5000 but there will be plenty for all and leftovers too.

Finally our life today as this people of St. James. Very soon after becoming Bishop of California in 2006, Bishop Marc Andrus began to speak of his vision of 'beloved community' in the midst of this remarkably diverse Diocese of California.

"Beloved Community" was a central concept in the thinking of Martin

Luther King, Jr. with nonviolence the means to attain it. In one of his first published articles King wrote that the purpose of the Montgomery bus boycott "is reconciliation, . . . redemption, the creation of the beloved community."

We began here at St. James to talk about the basic components of beloved community, or as we referred to it for years 'true community,' from Scott Peck's book *A Different Drum*. True or Beloved Community, we have identified nine components in the course of our work together over the years. I have asked members of the congregation to read them to us now, one by one.

Nine basics for St. James to continue to be a beloved community and to thrive are:

- 1) Every voice is heard, deeply listened to and respected;
- 2) There is openness and transparency in how the affairs of the community are run, how decisions are made and carried out;
- 3) The congregation makes the big decisions, with recommendations from the Vestry and the Rector;
- 4) There are many leaders, a few ordained and many lay, who communicate often and well and who work together with joy;
- 5) There is regular review of how the community is doing - review of clergy, vestry and congregation to make sure that all parts of the body are participating fully and effectively;
- 6) Visitors and newcomers, - strangers - , are welcomed and included; the community always consciously mirrors the radical inclusivity of Jesus;
- 7) The beloved community is on mission, at work in the world, in direct response to the Gospel;
- 8) The beloved community worships together regularly with thoughtful and meaningful liturgy. Prayer, corporate and private, is at the heart of the Body and of its members;
- 9) All members of the body are generous with who they are and what they have; generous in giving and in receiving. The community has

an attitude of gratitude.

As we take a few moments of silence before we welcome Francesca Teresa Salvini into our beloved community, which is of course, always a work in progress, the ushers will pass out cards. On one side is a beautiful poem written by Elizabeth Nelson about Saint James and our St. James stained glass window. Elizabeth has spent many an hour in the Choir looking over at the window of our patron Saint. One day, not long ago, this poem flowed from her pen. On the other side of the card, are the nine basic components of beloved community, St. James' style.

As we move more deeply into this time of transition, please keep this card and what is writ thereon close to you. You might even, God willing, come to know it 'by heart.'