

May I speak in the name of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

You may or may not have heard the allegedly true story about a US Navy captain who was in command of a destroyer. One night, the captain saw lights ahead, and realizing he was on a collision course, using Morse code, he signaled, "To avoid a collision, turn 10 degrees east." Back came a light signal in Morse code, "To avoid the collision, you should turn your vessel 10 degrees west." The captain was indignant and signaled back, "I am a US Navy captain. Turn your vessel," and a light signal came back, "I am a seaman, second class. Turn your vessel." Outraged at this insubordination, the captain signaled again, "I command a destroyer. Get out of my way," and a signal came back, "I am a lighthouse."

This is a useful little story. It's about lack of communication, about not getting the message. It's about the way that sometimes people seem to be throwing their weight around, when actually they may not be. And it also shows how when it matters, carrying rank isn't the most important thing. It is, to pick up a theme of our collect today, about true authority. And all of this is relevant when we come to think about this morning's gospel reading about those two enthusiastic, perhaps rather pushy, young disciples James and John, who dared to ask if they could sit in the most important places in Jesus' kingdom. At least Mark tells us that they asked, but as we heard this morning according to Saint Matthew's Gospel, it was their mother who asked the question, which maybe lets them off the hook a bit, though it does little to reduce the embarrassment factor. One can only imagine the conversation on the way home.

Saint James, apostle and martyr, sometimes called Saint James the Greater to distinguish him from the James who was the apostle who wrote the New Testament epistle, this Saint James the Greater is the one whose name this church bears. And this morning it's a great privilege for Selwyn College Chapel Choir and for me as the college's Dean of Chapel and Chaplain to be here with you, to help celebrate your patronal festival and remember

your patron saint on the Sunday closest to his feast day, which is the 25th of July.

Your Saint James is quite a character, a disciple with attitude. Those Christmas hymns about gentle Jesus meek and mild always leave me a bit cold because it seems to me that Jesus was anything but meek and mild, and I think it's interesting that Saint James, who along with his brother, John, were nicknamed Boanerges, sons of thunder. I think it's interesting that James seems to have been especially close to Jesus. I imagine that being alongside Jesus in first century Galilee would have been a challenging experience and not always a comfortable one. And I can't help wondering whether in these ardent and slightly impulsive young men Jesus may have recognized something of His own passionate spirit. This was by no means the only time that James and John earned Jesus' rebuke. They were the ones, if you remember, in that unfriendly Samaritan village where the people wouldn't receive Jesus, they were the ones who asked, "Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and destroy them?" They hadn't quite got the Christian message, had they? Was it this kind of zeal that not only got James his thunderous nickname, but also got him executed in Agrippa's time by Herod, so leaving him to become the first of the apostles to be martyred? We can only guess. But zealous and enthusiastic James seems to have been, and Scripture suggests he had a special place among the disciples. Jesus kept him close by Him. James was one of the three who was allowed to be present at the raising of Jairus' daughter. James was one of the very few who was taken up onto the mountain when Jesus was transfigured, and James was one of the three whom Jesus took aside, away from the rest of the disciples, when he was suffering His great agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. So more than most, James followed very closely the events of Jesus' ministry and he was undoubtedly close to Jesus.

Perhaps we shouldn't judge him, and his brother, and their mother too harshly for daring to ask of the one who said, "Ask and it shall be given to you." "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You. Grant us to sit one at Your right

hand and one at Your left in Glory." But it certainly riled the others and as Jesus explained, they didn't really know what they were asking. Wanting to be close to Jesus is all very well, but greatness in the kingdom of God is not about lording it over the others. Jesus tells them straight, "Whoever would be great must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many." It is this topsy-turvy kingdom that Christ offers His church.

Jesus was not the kind of Messiah Whom the world was expecting, which is perhaps why when Jesus asks Peter, "Who do you say that I am," and Peter says, "You are the Christ," Jesus tells him not to tell anyone. Instead, He goes on to explain that the Son of Man must suffer because in God's world, leadership and suffering go hand in hand and love is painful. In God's kingdom, kings serve and servants are raised up, the great are least and the least are great. And we remember Mary's great song of joy from Luke 1 in the words we call The Magnificand and here at Evensong "The Lord has shown strength with His arm. He has scattered the proud and the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich empty away." The kingdom of God turns the world's values on their head and this is what we're challenged to recognize and to proclaim in the church, in this church.

You are fortunate to have a patron saint whose enthusiasm and faithfulness were recognized and who was one of the first to hear Jesus' challenge to costly service. When Jesus asked James, "Can you drink this cup of suffering and be baptized with the baptism of my blood," he and his brother replied confidently that they could. What a witness for this community that by all accounts James actually did. What a witness for us as we seek to live out our common mission to serve one another and love as Christ loved us. What James had to learn though was that his own importance wasn't the issue. This call to service is a shared calling. It's something we're called to together in community. What is important is our dialog with each other about our

faith and our calling to be the church.

A few years ago, before I came to be chaplain at Selwyn, I was responsible for training and inducting university chaplains. We did a lot of work together on issues around multi-faith awareness, on celebrating diversity, and on being in dialog with people who thought in different ways. I remember being very struck by the ideas of someone called David Lockhead, who wrote a book called The Dialogical Imperative. Don't be put off by the title; he was just writing about the importance of dialog. And he describes four different ways that we go about our relationships with, for example, people of other faiths.

First, there's the way of isolation. This is where different faith communities simply ignore each other. Each to their own. You do your thing, I do mine. I'm not interested, but that's fine. Work in isolation. The second is the way of hostility. I do my thing and that's fine, but you're different from me and that isn't fine. I don't approve of your being different and not like me and I feel threatened, so I attack you. How many religious wars have started that way? The third way is to feel that we're in competition. You and I are actually in the same sort of business but we're rivals, so leave your place and come to mine. You may think you are right where you are, but my way of doing things is better and I'm better, so defect. Isolation, hostility, and competition, but the fourth and final way he describes of going about things is the way of partnership. I value my way of being who I am. I recognize that you feel the same and that we're not in the same place, but let's look for ways of working together where we can. And of course he doesn't advocate all these ideologies equally, and the assumption is that the closer we can get to the partnership end of the spectrum, the better, though, as we all know, it takes two committed partners to make a partnership.

Well I think that if all these things apply to the relationships between Christians and, say, people of other faiths, they also apply to the relations between people within faith communities, including the relationships between Christians in

churches. Isn't it the case, if we're honest, that sometimes even in our churches we work in isolation, or we cut ourselves off, or perhaps we're even hostile to each other or competitive with one another? And as we heard in our Gospel reading today, this was also the case in Jesus' time. But we have a common calling that we might all be one and we're asked to face up to our divisions and to work together for unity, and we need to accept our differences. Not deny our individuality, but resist hostility, and isolation, and competition and focus on our partnership and the Gospel if we're going to be effective witnesses.

And what better time than a patronal festival, I suggest, to recommit ourselves to that partnership in living out the Gospel here in La Jolla, or wherever we may find ourselves? We may need to accept kindly criticism as Saint James had to from time to time, but also recognize the privilege we have of sharing the good news and the welcome we receive at Christ's table. As we continue to work out how to be the church together around the world, may we be partners speaking out when it's right to, listening when we need to, so that together we may thrive in our mission to make the church feel less like that destroyer I mentioned at the start, led by important people telling others what to do and how to behave, and more like the lighthouse, full of seemingly less important people showing the way.

Amen.