

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

I must confess that before I came to La Jolla I knew very little about Saint James, who we remember particularly today on this our patronal festival. I knew a lot about Saint Peter, because I came from a church called Saint Peter's, but I had to do some investigating to mug up on Saint James. Let me share something of what I've learned. He had a brother, John, and Jesus gave the pair of them the nickname "Sons of Thunder". There's a story of them being told off by Jesus after they suggested that he call down fire on a Samaritan village.

It's fair to say just knowing that, that he might've had a rather fiery and robust personality. We can guess too that he was quite tall, because we refer to Saint James as Saint James the Greater, as opposed to the less. This is probably just on the grounds of his stature, that he was bigger than the other James. He was close to Jesus. He was part of Jesus' inner circle. He was one of those who went up the mountain when Jesus was transfigured. He may even have been Jesus' cousin. One thing we can be sure of is that he was the first Christian martyr. We're told in that story we heard in the book of Acts that King Herod had him killed by the sword.

Saint James is associated with pilgrimage. There's a very peculiar and unbelievable legend that his body miraculously got to Spain, floating in a stone coffin, and it's not in the Cathedral at Santiago de Compostela. That cathedral has always been a place of pilgrimage. The Camino de Santiago is a very popular pilgrimage route. We have a depiction of Saint James here in that window up there. He has the shell and the pilgrim's staff, which he's always depicted with.

I'm delighted that we have with us today somebody who has not only done a great pilgrimage, but written about it, Edie Sundby. She's written a terrific book that will be launching later, and I'll say something about that in the notices. As I go through this gospel passage and we think about Saint James today, I want us to think in the back of our minds how are we as a people shaped by

having James as our patron saint, because it's often been noticed that churches do take on something of the characteristic of the saint after whom they're named. What does it mean to us to be a church of Saint James? I'll return to that later.

First let me split today's gospel reading up into three sections. The first is this: a mother's request. The mother of James and John comes to Jesus with a question: Can my boys sit either side of you in the kingdom? Now we can't be sure whether the brothers put their mother up to this or whether she decided to do it herself. My hunch is that it was the latter, because judging by my experience mothers always have a clear sense of what's right for their sons. James' mother for whatever reason asked the question that's completely inappropriate. What makes it even more jarring is the context. Just before this reading starts in the bit that we missed out, in the verses before, Jesus says, "I'm going to be handed over, mocked, flogged and crucified and raised on the third day." Then straight after that, the brothers' mother wades in with, "Well, anyway, can my boys get the best seats?" It's an awful, jarring, inappropriate question. It's the wrong question at the wrong time.

Jesus was talking about the cross, but James' mother is much more interested in crowns. In passing, let me mention the kindness of Jesus' response. He doesn't say, which he might've done, "Don't be ridiculous" or "How insensitive". He doesn't say that. He doesn't get angry. He calmly explains to them that he wasn't in a position to answer their request. Jesus gives a kindly response. It's very different from the response that the disciples give to this question. When the other ten disciples heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. Interesting that they weren't annoyed with the mother of James and John, but at the brothers. It's not exactly clear what they were annoyed about, but we can guess. Maybe they thought that James and John had stolen a march on them and they were going to get in there first. Maybe they were thinking, "Why didn't I think of that?". We do know that they went on squabbling about the issue that James and John had raised.

At the last supper, the night before Jesus died, Luke

tells us the dispute rose among them as to which of the disciples was to be regarded as the greatest. I've been interested to think about this story on my return from England where, I don't know how much English politics you follow, but the politicians back home in our government are falling out, and they're falling out about this: who's the greatest, who should be the leader. It's exactly the same phenomenon, working out a pecking order. Although, the politicians in our English cabinet don't get their mothers to do their talking. They always get their so called friends, and a friend of so and so will say to a journalist, "Don't you think he or she would make a great Prime Minister?" It's the same phenomenon. In a way, how refreshing it is to see that human nature doesn't change, that the characters we see in the gospels, they're just the same as the characters that we live amongst today.

The disciples didn't get what Jesus was saying straight away, even in the course of his lifetime. It wasn't that Jesus told them once and they understood his teaching. He had to go through it with them time after time, patiently making the same points. Perhaps we should take comfort from that, that we don't get Jesus' teaching so easily and the disciples didn't, and they had the benefit of being with him day after day. A sculptor once carved a magnificent stone lion. Someone said to the sculptor, "How did you do that?" The sculptor replied, "It's easy. I just chipped away the bits that didn't look like a lion." That's how Jesus molded James and the other disciples. That's how he works on us, by his Spirit. It doesn't happen all at once. A sculptor has to work patiently, reworking things. If we're open to Jesus working with us, then slowly over time by his Spirit he'll work to make us more like him. He'll chip away the bits that don't look like him.

We've seen the mother's question, the disciples reactions. Thirdly, we get to Jesus' teaching. After Jesus heard the disciples squabbling amongst themselves, Jesus sits them down and explains to them what life is like in his upside down kingdom. He says, "You know that out in the world the rulers love to lord it over their subjects, the great ones are the tyrants. But in the kingdom of heaven, if you want to be great", Jesus says, "you must be a

servant. Whoever wants to be the first and greatest amongst you must be your slave." In other words he's saying, "I didn't call you to be a sensation, but a servant." This wasn't just what Jesus taught, it's how he lived. Saint Paul wrote this about him, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Obviously the cross is the supreme example of Jesus' humility, but there are other stories like on the night before he died when he washed the disciples' feet, performed a duty that was normally done by a slave. Our own passage today ends, "The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many." We are all called to greatness in the kingdom of God, which means that we're to serve one another as together we walk the way of the cross; which takes us back to where we started and that question of what it means to be identified as the people of Saint James. How does that shape us?

I think it means that we should understand ourselves as a pilgrim people, people walking together on the way of the cross. We're all travelers, and together we're exploring God's upside down kingdom, where the first ones are last and the last ones are first, and where the greatest must be a servant. One of the things that we're thinking about as a vestry, as a church, and I hope it's coming out over these summer weeks, is a desire to be more focused in what we can do as a church, to serve not just our own parish community, but those outside of our parish family. You'll be hearing more about that in future weeks, and particularly on Rally Sunday where we'll have identified particular things we can do to serve other people, that we might have that opportunity to put into practice what Jesus is teaching us here, that we'll take up those opportunities to serve. May we be those who find our greatness in the service of others. Amen.